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THE ROGUE'S COMEDY

THE ROGUE'S COMEDY

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

61043

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF
'THE TEMPTER,' 'THE CRUSADERS,' 'THE CASE OF REBELLIOUS SUSAN,'
'THE MASQUERADERS,' 'JUDAH,' 'THE MIDDLEMAN,' 'THE
TRIUMPH OF THE PHILISTINES,' 'THE DANCING GIRL,'
'MICHAEL AND HIS LOST ANGEL,' 'THE PHYSICIAN,'
'THE LIARS,' 'THE GOAL,' 'THE MANŒUVRES
OF JANE,' ETC.

London
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1898

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

Mr. Bailey Prothero.
Mr. Lambert.
Sir Thomas Dovergreen.
Lord John Bucklow.
The Marquis of Bicester.
Sir William Clarabut.
Mr. Robert Cushing.
Mr. Reffell.
Mr. Sydenham.
Mr. Hubbock.
Mr. Chester.
Mr. Pinniger.
Palmer.
1st Footman.
2nd Footman.
Servant at Lady Dovergreen's.

Miss Jenison, companion to Lady Dovergreen.
Lady Clarabut.
Nina Clarabut.
Lady Dovergreen.
Mrs. Reffell.
Miss Prove.
Mrs. Sydenham.

Guests.

ACT I

SCENE—BOUDOIR AT LADY DOVERGREEN'S.

(*Four months pass.*)

ACT II

SCENE—MR. BAILEY PROTHERO'S CHAMBERS, AUDLEY MANSIONS, MOUNT STREET, GROSVENOR SQUARE.

(*Six months pass.*)

ACT III

SCENE—RECEPTION-ROOMS AT 56 PARK

The whole of the action of the play takes place at the present time.

The following is a copy of the first play-bill of "The Rogue's Comedy."

GARRICK THEATRE. Season under the management of Mr. E. S. Willard. On Tuesday, 21st April, and every evening at 8,

THE ROGUE'S COMEDY,

A PLAY, IN THREE ACTS,

BY HENRY ARTHUR JONES

Author of 'The Tempter,' 'The Crusaders,' 'The Case of Rebellious Susan,' 'The Masqueraders,' 'Judah,' 'The Middleman,' 'The Triumph of the Philistines,' 'The Dancing Girl,' 'Michael and his Lost Angel,' etc.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

BAILEY PROTHERO . . .	Mr. Willard.
JENISON (Companion to Lady [illegible]reen)	Miss Olliffe.
[illegible]	Mr. W. T. Lovell.
CLARABUT . . .	Mr. Cecil Crofton.
[illegible]n (Lady Dovergreen's	Lady Monckton.
[illegible]	Miss Cora Poole.
[illegible]EN	Miss Robertha Erskine.
[illegible]OVERGREEN (her Son)	Mr. Sydney Brough.
[illegible]KLOW	Mr. David James.
[illegible]F BICESTER . .	Mr. George Canninge.
[illegible]	Mr. J. R. Crauford.
.	Mrs. H. Cane.
.	Mr. A. B. Tapping.
.	Miss Keith Wakeman.

Miss Proyt	Miss Ellen Meyrick.
Mr. Hubbock	Mr. George Willoughby.
Mr. Chester	Mr. Webber.
Mr. Pinniger	Mr. W. Levy.
Mr. Robert Cushing . . .	Mr. Herbert Standing.
Palmer	Mr. Hamilton Knight.
First Footman	Mr. Albert Sims.
Second Footman	Mr. L. Wenman.
Servant at Lady Dovergreen's . .	Mr. G. James.

Guests.

ACT I

Boudoir at Lady Dovergreen's.

(*Four months pass.*)

ACT II

Mr. Bailey Prothero's Chambers, Audley Mansions, Mount Street, Grosvenor Square.

(*Six months pass.*)

ACT III

Reception-Rooms at 56 Park Lane.

The whole of the action of the play takes place in London at the present day.

There will be intervals of twelve minutes between Acts I. and II. and fifteen minutes between Acts II. and III.

Matinee of "The Rogue's Comedy," Saturday next at 2.30.

ACT I

SCENE—BOUDOIR AT LADY DOVERGREEN'S, A HANDSOMELY FURNISHED ROOM IN A HOUSE AT KENSINGTON.

A large door, L., *stands open, and shows large drawing-room; small door down stage* R., *opening into* LADY DOVERGREEN'S *apartments.*

Discover LADY DOVERGREEN, *a comfortable, gouty old lady, with feet laid up on couch and propped with pillows;* LADY CLARABUT, *her sister, a bright lady about fifty,* MRS. SYDENHAM. *A servant handing round coffee.*

LADY D. I don't profess to understand how Mr. Prothero does it—I only know the first time I saw him he told me everything that had happened in my past life.

LADY C. I wonder, Caroline, that you permitted it. And I wonder you permit Tommy to make a friend of the man and bring him here to dinner.

LADY D. But he has given Tommy what is called

a tip about a gold mine, and Tommy has made five hundred pounds.

LADY C. A sprat to catch a mackerel. Depend upon it he'll lose five thousand before this Mr. Bailey Prothero has done with him!

LADY D. Oh no; Tommy is really a very sharp clever boy.

LADY C. I had never suspected it. Tommy gave me a tip at Newmarket, and another last winter at Monte Carlo.

LADY D. Well? What happened?

LADY C. I became convinced of the profound immorality of racing and all kinds of gambling. And I very much lowered my opinion of Tommy's judgment, and my own.

LADY D You don't understand Tommy's character.

LADY C. No, it always takes a mother to understand a boy's character. But Sir William is his trustee, and we understand enough to know that if we let this Mr. Bailey Prothero get hold of Tommy's money, we shall be blamed for not stopping the intimacy.

(MISS JENISON *appears at drawing-room door; a striking woman of an uncertain age, pale face, keen searching eyes, soft agreeable manner. She listens intently, but furtively, to the conversation.*)

LADY C. (*to* MRS. SYDENHAM). Don't you think I'm right, Mrs. Sydenham?

MRS. SYD. I must own Mr. Prothero thoroughly

astonished me when I gave him a sitting at his rooms in Bond Street the other day.

LADY C. How?

MRS. SYD. He told me all the particulars of my family history. How unhappy I am in my married life—how constantly my husband neglects and misunderstands me, and about the death of my favourite poodle six years ago. He was so sympathetic.

LADY C. How much did he charge?

MRS. SYD. His usual fee—a guinea.

LADY C. Why didn't you come to me? I'd have told it you all for nothing, and been equally sympathetic—especially about the poodle. What do you think of this Bailey Prothero craze, Miss Jenison?

MISS J. Sometimes I think like you, Lady Clarabut, that the man must have some clever confederates, who furnish him with particulars.

LADY D. Confederates? Who?

MISS J. Ah, that's it. But then again, that's impossible——

LADY C. Why?

MISS J. He knew, or seemed to know, so much of my past life.

LADY C. What in particular?

MISS J. Amongst other things how I met Lady Dovergreen at the hotel in Brighton last year, how Mrs. Murchison, my previous employer, had just gone to California, how Lady Dovergreen was taken ill and how I looked after her and became her companion.

And about the delay in my references from California. He knew the whole story, and yet—altogether I'm a little inclined to suspect him, aren't you?

LADY C. Very much.

LADY D. My dear Margaret, why? Mr. Prothero not only knows all about the past, but he can actually foretell the future. What do you say to that?

LADY C. I should say he'll come to grief—like Old Moore and Zadkiel. The past is such safe ground. If you love him beg him to stick to the past. So many prophets have lost their reputations by dabbling in the future.

Enter, L., MRS. REFFELL, *a fashionably-dressed woman about thirty*, MISS PROYE, *a maiden lady about forty-five, and* NINA CLARABUT, *about twenty.*

MRS. REFF. Still talking of this wonderful man?

LADY C. Have you consulted him yet?

MISS P. No, but we wish to. I was once placed in a fearfully compromising situation with regard to a very illustrious personage—a German prince, in fact. Now if Mr. Prothero knows anything about that——

MRS. REFF. I should like to know where my husband dined the two nights last week he didn't dine at home.

LADY C. At his club, my dear.

MRS. REFF. Yes, that's what he said. But I shall ask Mr. Prothero.

LADY C. Depend upon it, my dear, your husband knows far better where he dined than Mr. Prothero. I should take my husband's word for it.

MISS J. (*to* MISS PROVE). How very embarrassing that affair of yours with the prince!

MISS P. Oh, it was too dreadful!

MISS J. You did begin to tell me about it——

(*They talk apart.*)

LADY D. And what would you like Mr. Prothero to tell you, Nina?

NINA. Nothing. Mr. Lambert doesn't believe in him.

LADY C. Caroline, you have this Mr. Lambert here again this evening?

LADY D. Yes; he's an agreeable young fellow, and we are much indebted to him.

LADY C. Over your lawsuit. What do you know of him?

LADY D. Nothing except that he was engaged as junior in our case. Sir Edward Skennelsby was suddenly taken ill, and Mr. Lambert got a verdict for us and big damages. Sir Edward says he's the most surprising youngster he ever met.

LADY C. Yes, but who is he? Where does he come from?

LADY D. Ask Miss Jenison. I believe it was she who got Sir Edward to take an interest in him.

MISS J. I know very little about him. He was brought up by his aunt, an old school-friend of mine,

NINA. Sir Edward says he's certain to take a very fine position some day.

LADY C. Oh, I'm sure he'll reach the woolsack. But meantime I should like to know a little more about him.

NINA. Mamma, he's coming.

Enter, L., GEORGE LAMBERT, *a handsome young fellow, followed by* SIR WILLIAM CLARABUT, *a comfortable-looking man of sixty.*

SIR W. Upon my word it's really wonderful——

GEORGE. So is the three-card trick, till you know how it's done. Then, there's nothing in it.

SIR W. But I say, Caroline (*to* LADY DOVERGREEN), he's not exactly the sort of man one asks to dinner, is he?

LADY D. It was Tommy who asked him; in fact, insisted upon bringing him.

(*A burst of laughter from drawing-room.*)

LADY C. What is he doing now?

GEORGE. Describing to Lord Johnny all the most scandalous details of his past life.

SIR W. Johnny is delighted to find himself a far greater dawg than he remembered.

LADY C. I cannot hope that my experiences will prove so interesting or so varied as Lord Johnny's, so I shall have to be satisfied if Mr. Prothero will furnish me with a few quite commonplace details of my past history—such as——

LADY D. Such as what?

LADY C. Will you close the door for a moment, Miss Jenison? (MISS JENISON *closes door.*)

LADY C. Well, let him tell me the name of the man I first danced with——

MISS P. Who was he?

LADY C. Captain Capenhurst, at Edinburgh. Secondly, the age and the place at which I had the measles.

MRS. REFF. When was that?

LADY C. At Cheltenham, when I was seven. Thirdly, what I was doing at ten o'clock last Saturday evening.

MISS P. What were you doing at ten o'clock last Saturday evening?

LADY C. I really forget. Oh, yes! I had a cold and went early to bed, and at ten I was sipping a little hot whisky and water.

(*A chorus of bravos from the next room.*)

LADY D. Shall we join them in the next room?

(*Moving.*)

MISS J. Let me take your cushions in, Lady Dovergreen (*taking up cushions and assisting* LADY DOVERGREEN), and make you comfortable; then, if you don't mind, I'll go and see that your room is ready for the night.

(*Exeunt* SIR WILLIAM, LADY CLARABUT, MRS. SYDENHAM, MISS PROVE, *and* MRS. REFFELL *into the other drawing-room.*)

LADY D. Won't you wait and see how Mr. Prothero succeeds?

MISS J. I've a headache, and I really take very little interest in the man. I'm afraid—I'm afraid he's a little bit of a rascal.

(*Exeunt* LADY D. *and* MISS JENISON, L.)

NINA. Aren't you coming into the drawing-room, Mr. Lambert?

GEORGE. To watch this mountebank? I've already heard one poor beggar sentenced to seven years for swindling——

NINA. Aren't you a little hard?

GEORGE. On swindlers? I'm afraid I am. But I hope you don't think there is no tenderness or romance in my nature?

NINA. Lawyers aren't very romantic, are they?

GEORGE. They are like other people, like clergymen, like butchers: their natures are quite independent of their profession. It's curious how little a man's creed, or his trade, alters either his character, or his nature, or his features. The other day I saw a grocer at his shop door—his face was exactly like the late Lord Chancellor's.

NINA. What will your face be like when you are Lord Chancellor?

GEORGE. Miss Clarabut, you mustn't start me dreaming; I have no fortune, no influence, no name. I'm not likely to be Lord Chancellor. But I may

possibly be a fairly successful lawyer. My only dread is that success may come too late.

NINA. Too late for what?

GEORGE. Too late to give me the prize I am dreaming of.

NINA. I don't understand you.

GEORGE. I think you do, but it's right you should say you don't. There is one very great prize that I dream of, and long to possess. If you were to tell me there is absolutely no hope of my winning that prize——

NINA. What then?

GEORGE. I should go down to the courts to-morrow morning with a pound of lead here instead of a heart.

NINA. Then you'd lose your case.

GEORGE. I hope not. I should pluck up, and fight hard, and try to face my life.

NINA. Mr. Lambert, I mustn't encourage you in dreaming, because it's a very foolish habit for a lawyer. But if——

GEORGE. If what? If you could give me that prize as easily as you could give me that flower, would you?

NINA. Certainly not.

(*Throws the flower at him.*)

LADY CLARABUT *enters*, L., *to see her action.*

GEORGE. Miss Clarabut!

(*Picks up the flower, sees* LADY CLARABUT, *stands embarrassed.*)

LADY C. Nina, this Mr. Prothero is doing some wonderful things in the next room. I'd think you'd be interested.

NINA. Yes, mamma. (*Exit*, L.)

LADY C. My daughter dropped that flower, did she not? It was kind of you to pick it up. Will you give it to me? (*He gives her the flower.*) Thank you.

GEORGE. I beg your pardon, Lady Clarabut.

LADY C. What for.

GEORGE. I was betrayed into—into seeking a kind of understanding with Miss Clarabut.

LADY C. That wasn't quite nice of you, Mr. Lambert, was it?

GEORGE. I know. I ought to have asked you and Sir William first.

LADY C. It would have been quite useless.

GEORGE. Quite useless, Lady Clarabut?

LADY C. Quite. You are a very promising young man, but it might be many years before you could give my daughter the position and income she has a right to look for. I don't wish Nina to marry a great fortune, but she must have a comfortable certainty.

GEORGE. But I could offer her that in a few years.

I would work so hard! Lady Clarabut, I love her so much, and I think she cares for me. You wouldn't stand in the way of her life's happiness?

LADY C. How earnest you are! Oh, what a tragedy love is at twenty-five! What a farce at fifty! What's your income this year?

GEORGE. This year, five hundred pounds. But give me a hope of winning her, and in three or four years it shall be five thousand.

LADY C. (*laughs good-humouredly*). Oh, my dear Mr. Lambert!

GEORGE. What are you laughing at?

LADY C. You are so amusing! I had one lover who threatened to shoot himself if I didn't marry him. I had another who had delirium tremens, and laid it all to the intoxication of my eyes. But I never, no I never, had the luck to meet a man who was prepared to raise his income ten times over, and lay it all at my feet. Oh, if I had met that man!

GEORGE (*gallantly*). You would if I'd been born twenty years earlier! But as that is impossible, you oughtn't to deny me the next best thing, that of laying my heart and income at the feet of your daughter.

LADY C. (*struck*). Sir Edward Skennelsby is right. You'll make a successful pleader. But there is another point. You'll forgive my asking—I don't know your people——

GEORGE. I've never seen my father and mother

to my recollection. My aunt brought me up and educated me.

LADY C. But you surely asked about your father and mother?

GEORGE. Yes, many times, but she never would tell me.

LADY C. That's very strange. What reason could she have for withholding information about your parents?

GEORGE. Lady Clarabut, I'll tell you the truth. She did not tell me because there was something very painful connected with them.

LADY C. Of what nature?

GEORGE. I don't know. Sometimes she used the word painful—sometimes disgraceful.

LADY C. My poor fellow—this is a worse difficulty than the other. You must see I couldn't allow Nina to marry you after what you have told me. How can one tell that something may not turn up at any moment and connect you with—forgive my using the word—with something disgraceful?

GEORGE. Then it's quite hopeless?

LADY C. Quite. Unless you can find out what that secret was, and can absolutely assure me that it is buried for ever. (*He sighs and looks very dejected.*) Come! Come! Don't give way! Take an interest in something else.

GEORGE. I can't! In what?

LADY C. In anything. Try and find out the

secret of this Bailey Prothero's success. I know you think him a swindler; so do I. It would be a splendid thing for a rising young barrister like you to expose him. I don't like the influence he has gained over my nephew. So I'll help you. What do you say?

GEORGE. Yes, if you like—anything you like.

LADY C. Then it's a bargain. You shall turn his swindle inside out, and forget all about Nina.

Enter MISS JENISON, L.

LADY C. Now—where is this marvellous gentleman?

MISS J. He's still very busy, Lady Clarabut.

LADY C. But I'm getting impatient—I want him to tell me everything that has happened in my past life, and a good many things that haven't. (*Exit.*)

(MISS JENISON *shows concern.* GEORGE *comes up to her.*)

GEORGE. Miss Jenison, I've often wished to thank you. Sir Edward Skennelsby tells me that it was owing to a kind word you said to him that he took an interest in me, and helped me to my first brief.

MISS J. You are quite welcome——

GEORGE. Of course you knew my late aunt—I saw you there several times when I was a boy, but I really hadn't an idea that I had so good a friend in you.

MISS J. Oh, Sir Edward was dining here one night—I saw a chance of doing you a good turn—I hope you don't think there was anything unusual in it.

GEORGE. It was unusually kind. Thank you very much. (*Goes to door*, R., *and opens it.*)

MISS J. Good-night. (*Offers hand.*)

GEORGE. Good-night.

(*Exit* MISS JENISON, R.)

Enter MR. BAILEY PROTHERO, *about fifty-five, a quick, nervous, restless man with strong features, but shifty nervous excitable movements.* LADY CLARABUT *follows, as if pursuing him.*

PROTHERO (*waving her off*). Oh no, no, no. Excuse me, Lady Clarabut. I cannot be rushed like this. I must have time. The intense exertion of summoning up the past is something terrible!

LADY C. It must be, but nothing I should say to summoning up the future!

PROTHERO. They are both alike to me!

LADY C. Perhaps. But I don't quite understand —what is this inner vision that you speak of?

PROTHERO. If you had it, Lady Clarabut, you wouldn't ask. As you haven't got it, I can no more explain it to you than I could explain to a person born blind what sight is. I possess the gift or sense of clairvoyance or second sight, by which I see past

or future events as clearly as if they were happening before my eyes.

(GEORGE *slightly shrugs his shoulders and smiles at* LADY CLARABUT.)

PROTHERO. You don't believe me, Mr. Lambert?

GEORGE. Oh yes! I've often met people possessing your gift. Only a month ago I saw a dear old gipsy lady sent to gaol for using it to enlighten servant-girls as to their matrimonial destinies.

PROTHERO. But she was an impostor!

GEORGE. Yes. Curious fact. In humble life they always are impostors.

Enter, L., *quickly*, SIR THOMAS DOVERGREEN, *a smart young fellow, well dressed, with rather high squeaky voice, and buoyant, confident manner.*

TOMMY. Dear old boy, just one word. What about Koppiesfontein?

PROTHERO. Koppiesfontein?!

TOMMY. Old Sydenham has got hold of twenty thousand fully-paid shares at five bob. He's a little funky, and I think he'll let me stand in with him.

PROTHERO. Wait a day or two till I have considered.

TOMMY. I can't. You know what these things are. He may get a cable from the mine at any moment. If it's all right up they go, sky high, and then old Syd won't part. What do you say? Shall I have a flutter?

PROTHERO. One moment. (*Puts his hand over his*

eyes and remains as if buried in deep thought for some moments, then very oracularly.) Buy Koppiesfontein.

TOMMY. That's good enough for me. (*Goes off, comes back.*) I say, don't give anybody else the tip.

PROTHERO (*shakes hands*). I won't.

TOMMY. Thankee, dear old chap. (*Exit*, L.)

LADY C. And when are we to receive a little of your kind attention, Mr. Prothero?

PROTHERO. I am utterly prostrate for the moment. Can you let me have five minutes quite alone to collect myself? I must warn you that I cannot always guarantee a result——

LADY C. No? Well, perhaps that's wise. A judicious vagueness——

PROTHERO (*turns round on her with sudden ferocity that startles* LADY CLARABUT). I will beg you, madam, not to sneer at me in a house where I am equally a guest with yourself! I will beg you not to suggest that I am an impostor until you have proved me one. (*Opens the door* L.) Please to leave me alone. (*Very loftily.*) When I am ready for you I will send for you!

LADY C. I beg your pardon.

PROTHERO (*loftily*). Say no more. In five minutes I shall be ready to answer any question you like to ask me. (*Exit* LADY CLARABUT.)

(*As* PROTHERO *turns he stands face to face with* GEORGE.)

PROTHERO (*advancing kindly to* GEORGE). I'm

afraid I've not impressed you favourably (*offering his hand*), Mr. Lambert.

GEORGE (*putting his hands behind his back*). Oh, don't let that distress you, Mr. Prothero.

PROTHERO. I can't help letting it distress me, Mr. Lambert. (*Offering hand.*)

GEORGE. I'm very sorry, but——(*shrugging shoulders, refusing hand*). (*Exit*, L.)

(PROTHERO *stands piqued and hurt for a few seconds, then pulls himself together, walks very gingerly to the door* L., *listens for some seconds, silently turns the key in the lock, is crossing to* R., *when* MISS JENISON *puts her head out of door* R., *and holds out envelope.*

PROTHERO *puts his finger on his lip and nods. They meet in the middle of the room. She gives him the envelope. He wrings her hand very cordially. All this scene in a quick nervous whisper.*)

MISS J. Here it is. Everything I could get out of them.

PROTHERO. Thanks, old girl. I got on splendidly at dinner, didn't I? By Jove, Lizzie, I've had the devil's own luck lately! I've been right so often, and when I've been wrong it hasn't much mattered. I begin to think there must be something in it.

MISS J. Ssh! Take care! I wish you'd give it up.

PROTHERO. What for! We can't live on your

eighty pounds a year. It's a little risky perhaps, but it's the best thing I've ever had my nose in. Fancy my dining with all these swells—including my own wife, the best-looking woman of the bunch! (*Bowing politely to her.*) I say, you're in clover here.

MISS J. Yes, I'm very comfortable.

PROTHERO. You ought to be, after my Californian references. I did lay it on thick.

MISS J. You saw our boy?

PROTHERO. I saw him. I tried to make friends with him just now, but he cut me, wouldn't shake hands with me. Lizzie, he despises me.

MISS J. He doesn't know you.

PROTHERO. I rather think he does—too well.

MISS J. Take care of Lady Clarabut. She means to expose you. Don't give her a chance.

PROTHERO. Not me.

MISS J. She's going to ask you three questions. I've answered them there. (*Pointing to envelope.*)

PROTHERO. Rumbo. I say, Lizzie, how could I get hold of something about the Koppiesfontein Mining Company?

MISS J. I don't know. Why?

PROTHERO. I've told that young guffin to buy a heap of shares in it—I hope it'll turn out all right.

MISS J. (*points to envelope*). Take care of that—I think that's all you'll want to know. Oh—I smelt Miss Proye of brandy the other night—I fancy she drinks.

PROTHERO. Oh, the little finger, eh?

MISS J. Take care of Lady Clarabut.

(*Exit*, R.)

(*Left to himself*, PROTHERO *hurriedly opens the letter* MISS JENISON *has given him, scans the contents.*)

PROTHERO (*reading*). Miss Proye, "Engaged at eighteen to an army man who went out to India and died. Railway journey—breakdown—German prince" —hum—(*puts letter in pocket, silently unlocks door* L., *opens it, calls off*). I am now ready to give a seance to Miss Proye.

Enter MISS PROYE.

PROTHERO. Come in, my dear madam. (*Shuts door after her. Genially.*) Be seated.

MISS P. And can you really tell all that has happened in my past life? I don't believe you. Oh, I feel so nervous.

PROTHERO. Place every confidence in me. Be seated. Now ask me any question you please, or perhaps you would prefer me to tell you what passes across the field of my inner vision.

MISS P. Perhaps that would be better.

PROTHERO (*places himself in an attitude, shuts his eyes as if absorbed in deep thought.*) I see you in the flush of early womanhood, at the age of some seventeen or eighteen summers—perhaps nineteen. There is a soldier beside you, a gallant manly form.

MISS P. It's Jack! Poor Jack!

PROTHERO. He looks into your eyes. You possess a deep, a strange fascination for him——

MISS P. We were engaged.

PROTHERO. I see a sadness creeping over both your faces. It seems like the shadow of a parting. Is it so?

MISS P. Yes—go on.

PROTHERO. A parting—at—at—(*plunging*) Portsmouth.

MISS P. No.

PROTHERO. No? Are you sure? The town looks like Portsmouth.

MISS P. No, it was at Marseilles.

PROTHERO. It *is* Marseilles. I see the French flags flying on all the ships in the harbour. It *is* Marseilles. His boat steams away, he waves an adieu —he's gone! I see him again. He is much tanned.

MISS P. Yes, he went to India.

PROTHERO. I don't know whether it's India, or Africa, or Jamaica. But he is clearly tanned. That I'll swear to. Ah! some great misfortune is threatening him.—He is dead. Am I right, so far?

MISS P. Quite! He died in India. It's wonderful! How did you know?

PROTHERO. It all passed across the field of my inner vision. Let me try again. (*Puts himself in an attitude, shuts his eyes.*) It is winter. You are travelling—in a railway carriage. There is a stranger in

the carriage with you—from his appearance I should judge him to be a German—a man of some rank.

MISS P. It was Prince—— Oh! what have I said?

PROTHERO. There is a kind of accident—you are slightly injured—you faint away—the Prince bears you in his arms across the snow to the village inn——

MISS P. Oh! please—stop—at least—don't go on.

PROTHERO. He goes for the doctor—he waits upon you himself. The innkeeper insists upon addressing you as madam—it is most embarrassing for you both. Am I right?

MISS P. Quite. It was a most extraordinary adventure.

PROTHERO. Do you believe in my powers?

MISS P. I think you're too wonderful for words.

(*Gazing at him in wonderment.*)

PROTHERO. Thank you. I shall feel obliged if you will mention that to your friends.

MISS P. I will! I will! (*Going.*)

PROTHERO (*very solemnly*). One moment! Before you go——

MISS P. What?!

PROTHERO (*very seriously*). May I speak one solemn word of warning as a friend—I should say as a physician. (*She looks surprised.*) I have detected——

MISS P. (*alarmed*). What?

(PROTHERO, *standing, looks at her a few moments, and then makes an action of*

putting glass to lips. She shows great fright; he repeats the action.)

MISS P. (*much frightened*). Oh!—it's only rarely—very rarely—only when I have neuralgia.

PROTHERO (*shakes his head*). Don't have neuralgia! Put the break on, my dear lady—I beg you put the break on—pull yourself up——

MISS P. I will! You won't mention this to any one?

PROTHERO. Rely on me. And if you should hear any doubts expressed about me, I may expect that you will defend me?

MISS P. Oh, I will, you may be sure. Thank you so much!

PROTHERO. Don't mention it. (*Taking out a lot of cards.*) You may find these useful to distribute amongst all your friends. My charge for an evening is ten guineas. Please remember that I cannot always guarantee a result. And above all—put the break on—you are careering to destruction—put the break on—take care of these (*giving her the cards*)—as a friend, I adjure you put the break on.

MISS P. Thank you so much. I shall recommend you everywhere. And if any one questions your powers, I shall tell them——

PROTHERO. The simple truth! (*Opens the door.*) Mrs. Reffell, in one minute! (*To* MISS PROVE *as she passes out.*) The simple truth to these ladies and gentlemen, if you please! The simple truth is always

enough for me. (*Bows her out, closes the door.*) And a damned sight too much very often. (*Takes out letter, hastily glances over it.*) Mrs. Reffell—is very jealous—husband stockbroker—spends his evenings away from home—was away last Tuesday and Friday—h'm, h'm—h'm, h'm—a very easy case. Lady Clarabut—hum—dancing Edinburgh, Capenhurst—measles, Cheltenham—whisky and water, last Saturday night. (*Puts envelope in his pocket, opens door, calls out.*) I am now ready to give a seance to Mrs. Reffell.

Enter MRS. REFFELL; PROTHERO *goes to her with great sympathy.*

PROTHERO (*sympathetically*). Be seated, madam. Be seated, my very dear madam. (*Stands and looks at her with very great sympathy.*) Ah! (*Sighs.*)

MRS. REFF. Why do you look at me like that?

PROTHERO. You are a misunderstood woman. You are a woman of heart, of feeling—a woman with a wealth of devotion and affection, and you are not valued at anything approaching your proper worth. Am I not right?

MRS. REFF. Go on.

PROTHERO. I do not like to touch upon domestic matters——

MRS. REFF. That is precisely what I wish to consult you upon.

PROTHERO. Ah! One moment! One moment! I see you at home—in a room—your drawing-room, I presume?

MRS. REFF. When is this?

PROTHERO. Quite recently. You are dressed for dinner—you expect your husband—you wait—he doesn't come—you grow impatient—you ring—you ask for him. Am I right?

MRS. REFF. No. I rang, but I didn't ask for him.

PROTHERO. But you rang. I heard the bell! And if you didn't ask for him, you were surely thinking about him, eh?

MRS. REFF. Yes.

PROTHERO. I knew it. You dine alone. You eat but little. You return to the drawing-room. You wait! You wait! The hours pass in dreary silence. At last he comes—and then—you are silent no longer. It is the time and occasion for speech—at some length.

MRS. REFF. Don't you think I was justified?

PROTHERO. I agree with every word you said.

MRS. REFF. Now tell me where *he* was.

PROTHERO. I would rather not. Let us turn to some happier hour, to some scene of your childhood——

MRS. REFF. No, I don't wish to know anything about my childhood. I want to know——

PROTHERO. Where your husband dined last Tuesday and Friday.

MRS. REFF. Yes.

PROTHERO. Frankly, I will not tell you.

MRS. REFF. Why not?

PROTHERO. I am not here to stir up domestic strife. My profession is a peaceful one.

MRS. REFF. Is it a question of money?—I'll give you twenty, fifty guineas.

PROTHERO. If you were to offer me a hundred I could not tell you.

MRS. REFF. I don't believe you know.

PROTHERO. You doubt my powers? In this instance I am glad you do. But that being the case, you will allow me to say our interview is at an end. (*Opens door*, L.) Lady Clarabut, please——

Enter LADY CLARABUT, L.

MRS. REFF. No.

LADY C. Well, have you been successful, Mr. Prothero?

PROTHERO. I'm pleased to say I have not, Lady Clarabut.

LADY C. How is that?

PROTHERO. I unfortunately happened to call up a few scenes of Mrs. Reffell's domestic life. I regret they were not pleasant. I wished to dismiss them. But she is not willing. I must really decline to pursue the matter further. Come to me some other day——

MRS. REFF. No. I wish to know———

LADY C. What?

MRS. REFF. Where my husband dined last Tuesday and Friday.

LADY C. At his club, of course.

MRS. REFF. (*enraged*). That old fib again! (*To* PROTHERO.) Where did my husband dine last Tuesday and Friday?

PROTHERO. At his club, of course.

MRS. REFF. (*maddened*). Oh, I—I feel—I feel I could——— (*Passing out.*)

PROTHERO (*as she goes by*). Be calm, my dear lady! Be calm! (*Closes door after her, turns to* LADY CLARABUT.) Now, Lady Clarabut, I am at your service!

LADY C. I should like my young friend, Mr. Lambert, to be present during my sitting.

PROTHERO. Lambert! Why?

LADY C. To assist me. Candidly, Mr. Prothero, while you confine yourself to fortune-telling I don't think you'll do much harm. But you've obtained a hold on my silly nephew, Sir Thomas Dovergreen. You're leading him into speculation———

PROTHERO. I've put five hundred pounds into his pocket. I'm very sorry.

LADY C. You're sorry?

PROTHERO. Yes. I wish I had put it into my own.

LADY C. That's your business. My husband is

Sir Thomas's trustee, and I don't intend you shall ruin the boy.

PROTHERO. And so you intend to ruin me?

LADY C. I mean to stop your flourishing business as prophet if I can.

PROTHERO. (*insinuatingly*). Only you don't feel quite sure of yourself.

LADY C. Oh yes I do.

PROTHERO. Then why do you bring in a clever young lawyer to help you?

LADY C. And if you feel quite sure of yourself, why do you object?

PROTHERO. Oh, my dear lady, I don't object—bring him in by all means—but———

LADY C. But? What?

PROTHERO. I might call up a few rather delicate domestic episodes———

LADY C. Of what nature?

PROTHERO. Well—you are not quite understood at home—not quite, quite appreciated, eh?

LADY C. (*shakes her head at him, smiling*). Oh yes I am!

PROTHERO (*same business at her*). Oh no you're not!

LADY C. Oh yes I am———

PROTHERO. Oh no you're not———

LADY C. Won't you allow me to know what happens in my own home?

PROTHERO. No. That is what I am here to tell

you. You are a woman of heart, a woman of feeling. Do you mean to tell me, Lady Clarabut, that you are valued at your proper worth?

LADY C. No, my dear man, I don't—I'm not valued at one-hundredth part of my proper worth, and I don't know any woman who is. But in the eternal mismanagement, misgovernment, and oppression of my sex by yours, I don't know that I've very much to grumble at.

PROTHERO. And you're thoroughly, absolutely satisfied—matrimonially?

LADY C. Thoroughly! absolutely!

PROTHERO (*cordially*). You are the only woman I ever met who was.

LADY C. Have you finished with my domestic affairs? If so, I'll call in Mr. Lambert!

(*Going to door.* PROTHERO *makes a motion to stop her.*)

LADY C. You object?

PROTHERO. No—but—Mr. Lambert has a prejudice against me———

LADY C. I'll give you a chance to remove it. (*Opens door*, L.) Mr. Lambert———

Enter GEORGE, L., *bows to* PROTHERO.

PROTHERO. This is a little unusual, Mr. Lambert—but I'm quite willing to be cross-examined.

GEORGE (*seating himself*). Don't take any notice

of me. Go on with Lady Clarabut as if I weren't here. (*Seats himself, watches keenly.*)

PROTHERO. I'm ready, Lady Clarabut.

LADY C. (*turns round very sharply and suddenly*). My first dance! Where was it? What was the man's name?

PROTHERO (*very quiet, dignified*). Oh please give me fair play! Don't try to confuse me! Now! a little more gently if you please.

LADY C. Where did I dance my first dance?

PROTHERO (*puts himself in an attitude*). I see a town—there are hills all round—and a castle—somewhere in Scotland—is it Edinburgh?

LADY C. Quite right. And the man's name?

PROTHERO (*again puts himself in attitude*). Captain—Captain—(*suddenly*) Captain Capenhurst!

LADY C. How did you know that?

PROTHERO. If I were to tell you, you would be as wise as I am. Another question, if you please. Have you thought of one?

LADY C. Yes.

PROTHERO. Perhaps you'd like me to tell you what your question is?

LADY C. That would be clever of you.

PROTHERO (*again in attitude*). Wait! Wait! I see something—you are a child—a little girl—it is somewhere in the country—in the West of England—you are ill in bed—is it whooping-cough? No! It's measles! Am I right?

LADY C. Yes. I was going to ask you when and where I had the measles—it was when I was seven, at Cheltenham.

PROTHERO. What do you think of that, Mr. Lambert?

GEORGE. A wonderfully good shot, Mr. Prothero. Try again.

PROTHERO. Ask me something else.

LADY C. I've thought of something. But tell me again what I've thought of———

PROTHERO. Oh, that's hardly fair. Still—(*puts himself in attitude*)—Oh!

LADY C. What's the matter—What do you see?

PROTHERO. Really—do you wish me to tell you what I see?

LADY C. By all means———

PROTHERO. You are in bed again—I regret to say you are drinking something hot in a tumbler—which (*sniffs*)—which (*sniffs*) smells like whisky. Am I right?

LADY C. Quite. (*Suddenly.*) You were in the next room just now! You heard me!

PROTHERO. Lady Clarabut, please recall that.

LADY C. I beg your pardon. (*Suddenly.*) Tell me what I'm thinking now?

PROTHERO (*taken aback*). What you are thinking now?

LADY C. Yes. (*Appealing with a glance to*

GEORGE, *who rises. Very peremptorily.*) What am I thinking now? (*Looking at him very keenly.*)

PROTHERO. You are thinking that I'm one of the biggest swindlers you ever met, and you never were more mistaken in your life!

LADY C. Good! Shake hands. (*Holding out hand, shaking hands cordially.*) That's just what I was thinking. (*To* GEORGE.) Mr. Lambert, I've done! I hand him over to you.

Enter MISS JENISON, R., *and crosses to* L.

GEORGE. Would you mind my putting a few questions to you in the presence of the company?

PROTHERO. Not at all.

(*Exit* MISS JENISON, L., *leaves door open.*)

GEORGE (*goes to door*, L.). Will you all please come in? I am about to test Mr. Prothero's powers.

Enter LORD JOHN BUCKLOW, SIR WILLIAM CLARABUT, NINA, MRS. SYDENHAM, MISS PROVE, MRS. REFFELL, LADY DOVERGREEN *coming in last supported by* MISS JENISON, *who takes her to a chair, seats her comfortably, and stays beside her during the following scene, closely watching.*

LORD JOHN (*a fat, disabled, hobbling old aristocratic personage about seventy-five, with disjointed speech, involuntary whistlings, splutterings, and nervous grimaces*

and twitchings of features). Where is this fellow, what's his name? (*Little nervous whistle of few notes.*) Oh, here you are. (*Hobbles up to* PROTHERO.) I want to ask you—name of little hussy (*whistle*) I took to Switzerland eighteen-forty-nine—dark girl with curls—— (*Grimace.*)

LADY C. Hush, Lord Johnny—you really must begin to reform!

LORD JOHN. I will! I will! I'll begin to-morrow morning—dammy, yes—reform. I'll tell my man to remind me. (*To* PROTHERO.) I say——

(*Pulls down* PROTHERO'S *head to his, whispers.*)

PROTHERO. I think, Lord John, we have revelled enough in your past for one evening. Come to me in Bond Street one day, and I'll refresh your memory.

LORD JOHN. Thank you—thank you—so much—dammy, so much!

(*By this time all have entered.*)

GEORGE. Mr. Prothero has kindly permitted me to put a few questions to him. You profess to be able to see the past lives of those who come to you. (PROTHERO *bows.*) Can you see my past?

PROTHERO. Quite clearly.

GEORGE. My childhood?

PROTHERO. Quite clearly. Would you like me to try and recall a few memories?

GEORGE. Yes. If you have this power you will be able to supplement my few recollections so as to bring into my memory other circumstances connected with

them. For instance, I vaguely remember a summer night, and some gardens, and a lady singing——

PROTHERO (*throwing himself into his characteristic attitude*). The concert is over—in the crush you are separated from your—from the man and woman who are with you—you get lost—the man searches all over the gardens for you—you are crying bitterly—at last he finds you and takes you in his arms and kisses you again and again—you are very tired—you have to walk home—the man is tired too—he throws you over his shoulder and you fall asleep—the man drags on—you wake up crying—you are hungry—the man tries to get you something to eat—all the shops are closed—he stops at a coffee-stall and gives you some coffee and bread-and-butter just as it is beginning to grow light—you eat hungrily—you kiss him—and fall asleep again with your arms hanging round his neck. Does that agree with your remembrance?

GEORGE. Yes! Yes! Tell me—No——

PROTHERO. You wish me to recall some other memories?

GEORGE. Not here—not now.

PROTHERO. Why not? Recall this scene—a man is playing a concertina on a river steamboat.—As he comes off the boat a woman meets him and gives him a warning.—Do you follow?

GEORGE. Yes——

PROTHERO. He takes a cab, drives hurriedly away with you and the woman——

GEORGE. Stop.

PROTHERO. No. The man——

GEORGE. Stop.

PROTHERO (*pauses. Looks round.*) I'll complete the picture for you alone.

GEORGE. No——

PROTHERO. If you please—You have questioned my powers. I wish to convince you—One moment—(*Draws him aside, whispers.*) He takes you to a house close to a railway—the trains are rattling over your head—some men are smoking, drinking, swearing, playing cards—the police burst in—the man snatches you up and tries to escape—he is overpowered—he is dragged away—the woman cries and takes you with her. (*Aloud.*) Will you please tell the company, Mr. Lambert, if I have rightly recalled your past?

GEORGE. I own you have—perfectly—but——

PROTHERO. You still doubt me?

Re-enter SIR THOMAS DOVERGREEN *and* MR. SYDENHAM *reading telegram.* TOMMY *in wild excitement takes telegram from* SYDENHAM, *comes up to* PROTHERO, *takes his hand, shakes it warmly.*

TOMMY. Thanks, dear old boy! Cable from Koppiesfontein—splendid news—shares will be up to par to-morrow—(*Showing cablegram to* PROTHERO.) I've landed eight thousand pounds—I'm going to

make you a present of one of 'em for giving me the tip. Pen and ink.

(*Takes out a cheque-book, sits down to write.*)

LORD JOHN. I say—dear boy, what is this confounded mine—dammy—er—it is worth going in for.

SYD. Mr. Prothero, what are the future prospects of Koppiesfontein?

REFF. Shall you be at liberty to-morrow? Can you call at my office in the City? I should like to talk this over with you, Mr. Prothero——

TOMMY (*handing cheque to* PROTHERO). No, Reffell, my boy—Prothero is my pal. There's a cheque for a thousand down on account, dear old boy.

(PROTHERO *takes cheque.*)

LADY C. It seems strange, Mr. Prothero, if you have this wonderful power of foreseeing events, that you haven't taken advantage of it to make a fortune for yourself.

PROTHERO (*looking at cheque*). I've never had the chance, Lady Clarabut. But I mean to now! Sir Thomas, are you disposed to join me in a little speculation?

LADY C. (*deprecatingly*). No, Tommy!

TOMMY. Yes, auntie! (*To* PROTHERO.) Join you? Won't I? And only too glad! Make me your banker! Here's my cheque-book—whenever you want it. You write out the cheques, I'll sign them. I'm game for what you like, and to any amount!

PROTHERO. Mr. Reffell, I will call on you in the City to-morrow. I shall have some very large investments to make.

REFF. By all means. At what time may I expect you?

PROTHERO. At eleven. Has any lady or gentleman any other inquiry to make of me? No? If you will please excuse me, Lady Dovergreen, I have had a most fatiguing evening—Good-night, ladies and gentlemen! Good-night to you all. (*Exit.*)

CURTAIN.

(*Four months pass between Acts I. and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE—MR. BAILEY PROTHERO'S FLAT, AUDLEY MANSIONS, MOUNT STREET

A handsomely furnished dining-room. Door at back; door L. *Along the right side of room a table littered with remains of luncheon, wine and liqueur bottles, dessert plates, boxes of cigars, cigarettes, plates, dishes, serviettes, coffee service and cups, etc.*

Discover seated at table PROTHERO, THE MARQUIS OF BICESTER, LORD JOHN BUCKLOW, MR. SYDENHAM, MR. HUBBOCK, MR. PINNIGER, MR. REFFELL, MR. CHESTER, *and* SIR THOMAS DOVERGREEN, *smoking, drinking liqueurs and coffee. As curtain rises,* TOMMY *gets on his legs. His speech is frequently interrupted with exclamations of approval.*

TOMMY. Lord Bicester and gentlemen, you may think by my assuming this familiar attitude that I'm going to make a common or garden fool of myself. I'm not! A little friendly luncheon like this ain't the

time for letting off any superfluous piffle in the way of a speech. So I'll cut the cackle and come to business. We are here to form a snug little syndicate under the advice and direction of our worthy host, Mr. Bailey Prothero. It has been asked by certain persons, whom I will briefly describe as beastly duffing rank outsiders, "Who is Mr. Bailey Prothero? What has Mr. Bailey Prothero done? Where does Mr. Bailey Prothero come from, and who are his ancestors?" Lord Bicester and gentlemen—in reply to the question, "Who is Mr. Bailey Prothero?" I answer, "He is the jolly good fellow and dear old pal who sits there at the head of the table, smoking his cigar and liquoring up as calmly as if he hadn't got more brains in his little finger than all the rest of us have got in all our heads and bodies put together!"

PROTHERO. Oh no, Tommy—oh no! No psychology, please!

TOMMY. Yes, you have, Bailey! And you know you have! In reply to the question, "What has Mr. Bailey Prothero done?" I answer, "During the last three months he has given me the straightest of straight tips, whereby I have lined my breeches pockets with metal images of Her Majesty to the tune of ten thousand quid sterling." And that is quite good enough for this sportsman! In reply to the further question, "Where does Mr. Bailey Prothero come from, and who are his ancestors?" I answer, "I don't

know, and I thundering well don't care!" I have ancestors of my own, and while Bailey (*pointing affectionately to* PROTHERO) continues to supply me with straight tips, I will supply him with ancestors. He is welcome to mine if he wants any. I place the whole boiling of them freely at his disposal——

PROTHERO. Thank you, Tommy, thank you.

TOMMY. As freely as I place at his disposal my cheque-book, my friendship, my hand, my heart, my all. Lord Bicester and gentlemen, I ask you to drink the health of our host and the boss of our syndicate, Mr. Bailey Prothero—the best and straightest fellow that ever breathed! He will stick to you as he has stuck to me, and I will stick to him as long as he's got his honest old hand to hold out to a friend, as long as his dear old mug and his venerable locks waggle above his shoulders, and as long as he has got a straight tip to give me! Gentlemen, without any further tommy-rot, I give you Mr. Bailey Prothero, and the South African and Australian Gold and Land Investment Bank. (*Sits down.*)

(LORD JOHN *gets up. During his speech he is constantly interrupted and encouraged by cries of "Hear, hear!" "Bravo, Lord Johnny," etc.*)

LORD JOHN. My dear Bicester and gentlemen (*splutters*), I wish to add my testimony (*whistles a few notes*) to that of my enthusiastic young friend who has just sat down (*smacks his lips*)—to the merits of

our worthy host—dammy. I have arrived at—time of life (*grimace*) when having exhausted all other delights (*whistles a few notes*) I have nothing before me—dammy—but an old age of sincere repentance (*whistles*) for having enjoyed myself to the best of my powers every day—dammy—and all day long for the last seventy-two years. (*Smack of lips.*) Providence, having blessed me (*spluttering*) with wonderful constitution (*grimace*) and having given me—dammy—most expensive and exclusive tastes in wine—(*grimace*) in food—in cigars—in clothes—and in love—(*whistles a few notes*)—forgot—dammy—to provide me with any solid and visible means of indulging those tastes. (*Splutters and whistles.*) I was therefore compelled either to live—(*smack of lips*) life of most offensive virtue and industry—(*whistles*) or to gratify those tastes—dammy—at other people's expense. (*Grimace.*) I took latter alternative. But just as other people were (*smack*)—were getting tired of this arrangement, I had good fortune (*whistles*) to meet with our worthy host, Mr.—Mr.—Mr.—(*grimace*)—He obligingly made use of my name, and in return gave me most useful advice—(*spluttering*) with regard to certain—dammy—mines. I have not the remotest idea where those mines are situated—(*whistles*)—I do not know how our worthy host obtained his information—I only wish to express my implicit confidence in Mr.——

PROTHERO. Bailey Prothero.

LORD JOHN. Mr. Bailey Prothero's judgment—(*grimace*). Through acting on his advice I have satisfied my most rapacious creditors, and I have also (*spluttering*) provided my declining years with the bare necessaries of life—including some thirty dozens of eighty-nine champagne.—And, my dear Bicester—I hope you will no longer hesitate to follow the example which as your uncle and mentor I have set you (*chorus of "Hear, hear!"*), and join us on the prospectus of this Trust or Bank—or whatever the damned thing is called. I drink to Mr. Bailey Prothero and South African, South American—confounded company—dammy. (*Sits down amidst chorus of "Hear, hears!" and "Bravo, Johnny!" They all rise and drink to* PROTHERO, *calling out, "Prothero! Now, Prothero! Bailey!"*)

PROTHERO (*rising*). Lord Bicester, Lord John, and gentlemen, I thank you most heartily for the cordial way in which you have drunk my health, and for the confidence you have reposed in me and the great enterprise upon which we have embarked. I am always deeply touched by proofs of confidence. It is my nature to be sensitive on this point. Confidence is the one thing I cannot live without. I own I have felt wounded by some remarks made by Lord Bicester as to the soundness of our undertaking——

LORD B. Oh, Mr. Prothero, I assure you—I assure you——

PROTHERO. You are perhaps right to be careful,

Lord Bicester, but I felt wounded none the less. I have been challenged both in public and private as to the sources of my information, the precise means by which I was able to foretell the enormous rise that has taken place in certain mining shares during the last few months. Gentlemen, I absolutely decline to explain the nature of those gifts of insight and prediction whereby I have been so successful. I will not lay bare the workings of my soul to any one. In reply to the charges of imposture and swindling that are so freely brought against me by a certain weekly paper, I triumphantly point to the results I have achieved. (*Cries of "Hear, hear!"*) Have I been successful in advising you to embark in certain enterprises? (*Cries of "You have!"*) Have I put money in your pockets, or have I not?

TOMMY (*slaps his pockets, which jingle with coin*). You have! You have!

PROTHERO. Then I claim your confidence for the future. Confidence is what I demand. Confidence is what I must have if the affairs of this company are to be brought to a successful issue under my advice. Our friend Mr. Hubbock may float our company as he has floated others, our friend Mr. Reffell may work it, our friend Mr. Sydenham may go to South Africa and Australia and report on the various properties, and our dear old friend the British public may subscribe for our shares, but unless I have your implicit confidence, the South African and Australian Gold

and Land Investment Bank will come to grief, as surely —as surely as my name is Bailey Prothero. For the last time, Lord Bicester, all of you, if you have not the utmost confidence in me, say so now, and leave me—leave me to develop this scheme, and pocket the proceeds myself! (*Cries of "No, no, no!"*)

TOMMY. No, no, go on, you old mascot, go on!

PROTHERO (*shaking hands all round*). Thank you, gentlemen! Thank you for this proof of your confidence. With that assured we march to certain victory. I foresee plainly a great and glorious future for South Africa. I foresee plainly a great and glorious future for Australia. I foresee plainly a great and glorious future for ourselves. I thank you for your confidence. If that confidence is misplaced, let any man come to me five years from to-day and tell me so. And I will meet him face to face and frankly own that I was mistaken!

(*Loud applause from the company; as he sits down a little movement amongst them—one or two guests get up and talk apart.*)

SYD. I must be going, Prothero. I have heaps of things to do if I start next week for the Cape.

PROTHERO. *If* you start next week for the Cape—You do start, my dear Sydenham. We rely upon you to supplement my advice.

REFF. And I must be getting back to the City.

HUB. One word—I must know to-night for certain

whether we are to have Lord Bicester's name on our prospectus.

PROTHERO. What do you say, Lord Bicester? We are waiting for your decision——

LORD B. (*a very mild, timid, nervous man about forty*). Well, Mr. Prothero—of course—if the thing is all right—I should be delighted to join you——

PROTHERO (*very sternly*). *If* the thing is all right, Lord Bicester—*If* the thing is all right——?

LORD B. Yes—understand me—I don't wish to convey that the thing is not all right—in fact I'm convinced that the thing is all right—quite all right——

PROTHERO (*blankly*). Well?

LORD B. Only—don't you know—I don't wish to lend my name to anything that is not—quite all right.

PROTHERO (*decisively*). Mr. Hubbock, please to withdraw Lord Bicester's name from the prospectus. He will not join us.

LORD B. Oh yes, oh yes, I fully intend to——

PROTHERO. I would prefer you should not.

LORD B. Oh yes. I quite accept your assurance that the thing is all right. Mr. Hubbock, I go in with you. You may restore my name to your prospectus.

HUB. Thank you, Lord Bicester. Come, Reffell Sydenham— (*General hand-shaking.*)

SYD. See you to-morrow, Prothero.

(*Shaking hands.*)

PROTHERO. I shall be free at eleven. (*Shaking hands with* REFFELL *and* HUBBOCK.)

(*Exeunt* REFFELL, HUBBOCK, *and* SYDENHAM.)

PROTHERO. Chester, Pinniger, are you going?

(*Shaking hands with them.*)

CHESTER. We must, dear old fellow.

(*Exeunt* CHESTER *and* PINNIGER.)

LORD JOHN. Bye-bye. I say, my dear boy, I cannot remember name of that little hussy—(*whistles*) that I took to Switzerland year eighteen-forty-nine—you told me all about her—little dark girl——

PROTHERO. Hush—Lord John—Business! Business! Love is the business of our youth—Business is the business of our maturer years.

LORD JOHN. No! No! Dear boy! Love, dear boy—Love! love! love is the only business that is worth doing on this confounded planet of ours. Love! Love! (*Whistles.*) Come along, Bicester—I cannot remember name of that little—hussy—dammy——

(*Whistles. Exit.*)

LORD B. Good-day, Mr. Prothero—delighted to join you—(*nervously*). One word in strict confidence ——you'll excuse me—the thing is quite all right, eh? eh?

(PROTHERO *slightly winks at him, laughs, and grasps his hand. Exit* LORD BICESTER *with satisfied expression on his face.*)

TOMMY. Good-bye, dear old chum. (*Looks at him.*) By Jove, Bailey, the more I look at you, the

more I wonder how that one darned old head of yours holds all your brains——

PROTHERO. It *is* a tight fit.

TOMMY. How d'ye do it, eh, Bailey?

PROTHERO (*slightly winks at him, laughs, shakes head*). Pocket your profits, Tommy, and don't ask questions.

TOMMY. I won't. Only, I say, Bailey—(*very confidentially*)—Is there anything in this inner vision, or is it all tommy-rot, eh?

PROTHERO (*looks at him calmly and very viciously for some moments, then speaks*). If you insult me by asking me that question again, I'll call up my man and I'll have you placed on the outside of my front door with instructions that you never see the inside of it again.

TOMMY. I beg your pardon. Dear old boy, I didn't mean it. You'll look over it?

PROTHERO. This time, yes. But understand me, if you dare to question my powers again, either to yourself or to any living man——

TOMMY. I won't, dear old man. I won't, I assure you. I believe in you thoroughly—only I don't quite know how it's done. Shake hands, dear old fellow.

(PROTHERO *shakes hands reluctantly.*)

TOMMY (*shaking hands*). I'm awfully sorry. I say, we have been landing 'em lately, haven't we?

(*Tapping his breeches pockets.*)

PROTHERO. We have been landing them lately.

(*They both stand tapping their breeches pockets and laughing.*)

TOMMY (*shaking hands*). Bye-bye, dear old Bailey. (*Goes to door, about to exit; returns.*) I can't help it. I must come and have another look at you. You are a clever devil. I must shake hands once again, dear old boy.

(*Another hand-shake and laugh; taps breeches pockets,* PROTHERO *does same. Exit* TOMMY, *laughing.*)

PROTHERO (*laughs in harmony with* TOMMY. *When* TOMMY *exits he continues laughing; changes the tone of his laugh; it grows louder and fiercer and more contemptuous; laughs again and again contemptuously*). My fools! My fools! My fools! My pretty, pretty, pretty fools! My team of fools! My perfect world of perfect fools!

Enter PALMER, *showing in* MISS JENISON.

PALMER (*announces*). Miss Jenison. (*Exit.*)

MISS J. George——

PROTHERO (*watches* PALMER *off, executes a few steps of a dance round her*). Come in! Make yourself at home, Mrs. Bailey Prothero, alias Mrs. Stanley Browne, alias Miss Jenison, alias Mrs. George Jackman!

MISS J. Hush! Hush! How did the luncheon go off?

PROTHERO. Rumbo!

MISS J. And the Company? Have you started it?

PROTHERO. Yes! I've bagged the Marquis of Bicester! I bluffed and bullied him into it, and I've got all these sharp City men in tow, Reffell, Sydenham, Hubbock, the whole pack of them! They're teaching me a high old game, and they think I'm teaching them. And the devil of it is I'm nearly always right! Did you ever know such luck? Luck! It can't be luck! There must be something in it! There must be a little cherub sitting up aloft with special instructions to take care of me. I can't go wrong! Lizzie, in six months I shall be making so much money I shan't know what to do with it! Come! Sit down and enjoy yourself! Take off your hat and coat!

MISS J. Shan't I shock that respectable man-servant of yours?

PROTHERO. Shock him! Do him good! Respectability be hanged! I've had all these swells to luncheon till I'm simply bursting with respectability. Sixpenn'orth more will be the death of me. Take them off, my girl! (*Unfastening her cape and taking off her hat.*) Take them off! Why do you wear such things as these?

(*Flinging her cloak on one side, pitching her hat on to his toe, and kicking it across the room.*)

MISS J. Oh, George, my best hat!

PROTHERO (*banging the feathers about*). And a damned bad one it is. Get another one, my girl! It's not good enough for you! (*Cuffing it about.*)

Here! (*Taking out a leather pocket-book from his pocket, and a bundle of notes from it, stuffing them into her hand.*) Go and spend some of my money! Go and buy up Marshall and Snelgrove! Buy up Lewis and Allenby! And then come back and ask for more, God bless you! Sit down. Have a drink! Put a name on it, Chartreuse, Maraschino, Curaçoa, Champagne——

MISS J. Champagne.

PROTHERO. Rumbo! Eighty-four. We'll have it in the tankard that young guffin gave me for stuffing him about the mines. (*Pouring out champagne into a tankard that stands on the table, giving it to her.*) There! And before we turn over our new leaf I'll give you a toast—The past, old girl!

MISS J. The past! (*Drinking.*)

PROTHERO. The jolly, rowdy, rollicking old past! Lizzie, this is better than playing the concertina.

(*Humming a song with the motion of playing the concertina.*)

PROTHERO. Lizzie, I've been to look at a house in Park Lane this morning——

MISS J. Park Lane?!

PROTHERO. Yes! Why not? What a fool I was not to try honesty first! What a fortune I should have made by this time!

MISS J. And you do mean to try honesty now, don't you, dear, for all the rest of your life?

PROTHERO. Of course I do! I always have been

as honest as circumstances permitted. No man can say more. And the richer I grow, the honester I get! Besides, there's no need to be dishonest in London! There are so many ways of swindling the people—honestly. Here, take this order to view the house. Go and look over it this afternoon, and come back and tell me how you like it.

MISS J. (*taking house agent's order from* PROTHERO). George, don't you think if we make too much of a stir in the world something may turn up?

PROTHERO. Not it! It's a good many years ago. Nobody's likely to recognise us. If anything ever does turn up, put it all on to me.

MISS J. In this world—or the next?

PROTHERO. Oh dear! There's that conscience of yours bobbing up again! That's the worst of you, Lizzie. Just when everything is serene and beautiful, the birds are chirruping around us, the flowers are blooming on every side, we go festively along hand in hand sipping the sweets of life together, when all of a sudden up bobs that confounded conscience of yours and sheds a sickly gloom over the whole land scape! Shut him up in his box, there's a dear girl. Shut him up and keep him there!

MISS J. Forgive me, George. You know what my people were before they came down in the world, and how strictly I was brought up. And when I think of my sister Annie, and how really good she was——

PROTHERO. Strike an average! She was good enough for both of you. Thank God there was so much goodness in the family. Come, drop it! It's all done with! There's only one step between a rogue and an honest man, and I've taken that step, once and for all!

Enter PALMER, *bringing a lady's visiting card on tray.*

PALMER. Lady wishes to see you, sir.

PROTHERO. Another of 'em! I can't see her. Tell her that the constant exercise of my powers of second-sight has completely shattered my nervous system. My physician has positively forbidden me to use them upon all ordinary subjects. Has Mr. Lambert called?

PALMER. No, sir.

PROTHERO. Show him up when he does.

PALMER. Yes, sir. There's a shabby party in the hall, sir. He says you've lost a diamond stud and he's found it, and he won't give it up to any one but you.

PROTHERO. I've not lost any diamond stud.

PALMER. No, sir.

PROTHERO. Show him the door, and take care of the coats and umbrellas.

PALMER. Yes, sir. And you can't see this lady to-morrow or at any time?

PROTHERO (*impatiently*). No, no. I cannot, I will not wreck my nervous system to satisfy their idle

curiosity. Tell that to all of them. (*Exit* PALMER.) I say, Lizzie! I gave up the fortune-telling business just in time. You remember that Mrs. Enderfield that we couldn't get to know anything about?

MISS J. The pretty little dark woman?

PROTHERO. Yes. I plunged into her domestic experiences and put my foot in it. Her husband came and kicked up a devil of a row; wanted to shoot me. I'm well out of it, Lizzie. Lucky these mines turned up just in time!

MISS J. George, don't you think we'd better——

PROTHERO. Now I know what's coming—He's going to bob up again. Shut him up! Shut him up! Put him in his box.

MISS J. Is George coming this afternoon?

PROTHERO. Yes. I asked him to lunch, but he wouldn't come.

MISS J. Why not?

PROTHERO. He won't accept my hospitality. He won't let me put any good things in his way. He only comes because he thinks that I can tell him something about his father and mother.

MISS J. But you won't?

PROTHERO. Yes, I shall—some day.

MISS J. No, no, George. Our promise to Annie—you know it was a sacred promise when she took him and educated him that we would never claim him.

PROTHERO. Promises! Pancakes! I'm going to claim my son. He's clever, Lizzie. He's clever.

I sneaked into court the other day and heard him plead. Oh! he's clever—I can't help feeling proud of him, though he does come here and insult me. By Jove, Lizzie, there must be a lot of latent honesty in me to be the father of a boy like that! I suppose honesty's like the gout, it runs in certain families for several generations, and then it skips a generation. It tried to skip me, and nearly succeeded.

MISS J. George, you won't tell him?

PROTHERO. Why not?

MISS J. He has set his heart upon this girl. If we keep quiet and he's successful at the bar, I feel sure Lady Clarabut will give her consent in a year or two. But if we tell him——

PROTHERO. What then?

MISS J. He knows that there is something disreputable connected with his father and mother. He'll never rest till he finds out what it is.

PROTHERO. We'll tell him ourselves. We can skip the worst, and let ourselves down gently.

MISS J. (*shakes head*). He'll drag it all out.

PROTHERO. Well? What if he does?

MISS J. He'll be bound in honour either to tell Lady Clarabut or——

PROTHERO. Honour! Pancakes! Let him keep his mouth shut and marry the girl.

MISS J. He won't do that. He'll give her up. And what will he think of us? What will he think of me? How he will hate and despise me!

PROTHERO. He shan't despise you, Lizzie. If he must have a parent to despise, let him take it out of me. But wait a few months till I've made my pile and we've moved into our house in Park Lane. Then I'll heap coals of fire on his head! Wait, wait! He won't refuse to be my heir. He can't be so honest as all that! Yes, wait till the right moment comes, and we'll own our boy, and he shall own us, too! Now about our wedding——

MISS J. I suppose we shall have to be re-married?

PROTHERO. Of course we must. Lucky devil I am to marry a woman like you twice over!

MISS J. It won't be illegal, will it?

PROTHERO. Not a bit. The more married we are the more respectable we become We'll hurry things up. We'll have a splendid turn-out this time, old girl, very different from our first wedding. Lord Bicester has got a cousin a bishop. I wonder whether we could nobble the bishop for the ceremony?

Enter PALMER, *with letter on tray.*

PALMER. The shabby party has come back, sir, and asked me to give you this.

(PROTHERO *takes letter, which is written on a dirty sheet of notepaper, enclosed in a dirty envelope, opens it, shows annoyance with shade of fright.*)

PALMER. He says he's sure you'll see him, sir.

PROTHERO (*having glanced through letter*). It's all right, Palmer—I have lost a diamond stud. Show the man up. (*Exit* PALMER.)

PROTHERO (*gives letter to* MISS JENISON, *in an alarmed whisper*). It's Bob Cushing.

MISS J. Cushing! What will you do?

(*Taking letter.*)

PROTHERO. S'hush!

(*Opens door* R., *motions her in, puts finger on lip, closes door after her; turns to the other door, where* MR. ROBERT CUSHING *enters, shown in by* PALMER, *who withdraws, closing the door after him.*

MR. ROBERT CUSHING *is a disreputable personage about fifty-five, with face giving evidences of past joviality, dissipation, and depravity; unshaven, very shabbily dressed in a dirty light long coat, with capacious pockets in front and also behind. This coat buttons over a very dirty flannel shirt. He has no waistcoat and no tie. A limp dirty white collar, black shiny greasy frayed trousers; a shabby shapeless low black hat with a very narrow brim; old boots, showing a bit of stockings at the toe; band of crape on his arm. He enters, looks round in amazement at the room, whistles astonishment.*)

CUSH. Georgy, dear old pal, your diggings?

PROTHERO (*curtly*). No; belongs to a friend of mine. What do you want here?

CUSH. Well, I happened to be passing—I saw you come in—I knew I should be welcome——

PROTHERO. Whom did you ask for downstairs?

CUSH. Well, I didn't ast for Mr. Long-Firm Jackman. I ast for the guv'ner, not knowing exactly what your name is—at present. (*Looking again round the room.*) So you ain't the guv'ner then?

PROTHERO. No. I'm here for a few days till my friend comes back. Bob, where can I see you to-night on important business?

CUSH. Outside the old place in Soho?

PROTHERO. Right. Be there at ten. Clear out now. (*Goes to door, tries to get* CUSHING *towards it.*)

CUSH. Wait a bit, Georgy. You needn't be in such an hurry to get rid of me.

PROTHERO. Well, what the devil do you want?

CUSH. Well, look at me! What is there I don't want? It ain't kind of you to show me the door the first blessed minute I meet you. (*A little snivel.*) And such pals as we always was! And after all I've suffered. (*A little snivel.*)

PROTHERO. Well, what have you suffered?

CUSH. (*edging towards table*). Suffered? Oh Lord! Gracious goodness! Well! There! What haven't I suffered? And the worst of all is the utter want of self-respect. That's what's the matter with

me, Georgy. (*By this time he has got to luncheon table and is peering amongst the dishes and bottles.*) Does there happen to be a toothful of anything wet about? (*Takes up tankard, drinks; after a mouthful removes it from his lips.*) Golly! Fizz! (*Drains it, and seats himself comfortably on end chair, which is turned towards audience.* PROTHERO *shows great disgust and impatience.*) Suffered! Well! There! The trouble I've had would have broke the heart of a bullock.

(*During the following scene* PROTHERO *shows great disgust and impatience, and gives vent to contemptuous exclamations.* CUSHING *eyes the things on the table, and, as* PROTHERO'S *back is turned, drops a box of cigars and a couple of spoons into his pocket at suitable moments.*)

CUSH. (*continuing*). My poor dear wife, Georgy! You knew her. She always admired you. She said if it came to sheer intellect, that old Gladstone wasn't in it with you! Ah! (*Is overcome with reminiscences.*) What that dear martyr endured!

PROTHERO (*curtly*). What was the matter with her?

CUSH. Internal complications. Oh Lord! Her poor dear legs swelled till they was as thick as my body. Gracious goodness! Well! There! (*Drops a spoon into his pocket.*) And now she's gone!

(*Cries a little.*)

PROTHERO. Gone?! I should think she is! And very glad she must have been to get the chance!

CUSH. Why so, Georgy?

PROTHERO. You were always beating and kicking her, and swearing at her!

CUSH. That's it, Georgy! That's it, dear old pal! It's that what makes it so hard to bear. The memory of what that poor dear angel went through, and all along of me! And how she loved me for it! Oh Lord! Gracious goodness! Well! There! (*Cries.*)

PROTHERO. When did she die?

CUSH. Two years ago last January. I wouldn't tell you a lie about it.

(*At this moment his hand is toying, as if carelessly, with a spoon which is near him on the table.* PROTHERO *remarks the action, goes behind him, lifts his hand carefully away from the table, and places it on his chest in front of him.* PROTHERO *then glances over the table, misses the articles that have gone.*)

PROTHERO (*ordinary voice*). Get up, Bob.

CUSH. Eh?

PROTHERO. Get up!

CUSH. Me?

PROTHERO (*makes movement to indicate him to rise.* CUSHING *rises reluctantly*). Turn out your pockets.

CUSH. Eh?

(PROTHERO *points peremptorily to his pockets.* CUSHING *draws out a box of cigars.* PROTHERO *takes it and places it on the table, comes back again, points peremptorily to* CUSHING'S *pockets.* CUSHING *then more reluctantly draws out two spoons.* PROTHERO *takes them, places them on table, glances round to see that all is safe, moves* CUSHING'S *chair right away from the table.*)

PROTHERO. Have you anything more to say?

CUSH. Well, dear old pal, what am I to do? That's the question as confronts me. I ast you that. Look there! (*Opens his coat and shows an absence of waistcoat.*) My coat's away for four bob (*producing pawn-ticket*). There's the ticket!—I wouldn't tell you a lie about it. What am I to do, old pal?

(PROTHERO *looks at him for some seconds.*)

PROTHERO. Do you think you've sense enough to hold your tongue and honesty enough to be honest to me—if I trusted you?

CUSH. I'll try, Georgy. I think I could be honest—if I tried. And if it was made worth my while.

PROTHERO (*looking him up and down*). You're a sweet-looking object! I shall have to fake you up a good bit.

CUSH. Don't you be afraid of that, dear old pal! I can pass muster for a gentleman anywhere, and in

any company, providin' I'm togged out, and keep my blessed mouth shut.

PROTHERO. Keep it shut altogether. Now! You'll start for South Africa at once, and you'll watch another man I'm sending out and cable me exactly what he's doing.

CUSH. Right. And what will the remuneration be?

PROTHERO. Not a farthing. Just your expenses till your work is done. Then if you've done it well and kept your mouth shut, leave it to me.

CUSH. All right, Georgy. I throw myself on your honour—and, I say, have you got such a thing as a decent coat and an 'at with a little shape in it? (*Showing his hat.* PROTHERO *rings bell.*) And just a quid—or a fiver—make it a fiver, dear old Georgy—for the sake of old times. How's the missus?—you'll excuse my not asting for her before——

PROTHERO (*giving him a note*). Yes, if you never ask for her again.

Enter PALMER.

PROTHERO. Palmer, this man has found a diamond stud of mine. Give him the old overcoat and hat that I've left off, and show him the door.

PALMER. Yes, sir. Lady Clarabut and Miss Clarabut have just driven up, sir.

(CUSHING *shows interest at mention of* LADY CLARABUT'S *name.*)

PROTHERO. Show them up, Palmer. (*Exit* PALMER.) Now be off. I'll give you all the particulars when I see you to-night.

(CUSHING *has got towards table and is eyeing the spoons.* PROTHERO *glances sharply at him.*)

CUSH. I hope you'll look over the spoons, Georgy—it ain't that I'm bad by nature, it's only my prepensities!—you know that. As a kid I was most respectable—and pious! But what did I do? I went and broke my dear old father's and mother's hearts—I did—both of 'em. And what followed? Loss of self-respect! That's what's so hard to bear, Georgy—the total absence of all self-respect! (*Glancing down at his clothes.*) Look at my trousis and boots! Nobody—I don't care who he is—not even the Prince of Wales couldn't respect himself in a pair of bags like this! Oh Lord! Gracious goodness! Well! There! (*Exit.*)

Re-enter MISS JENISON, R.

MISS J. Well?

PROTHERO. It's all right. He doesn't know who I am *now*.

MISS J. What are you going to do with him?

PROTHERO. Pack him off to South Africa, and get him to watch my friend Sydenham. He may be a lot of use to me out there, and he can't do me any harm.

I shall be able to keep a check on Syddy, and I'll astonish all the others by telling them exactly what Syddy is doing.

MISS J. But if Cushing finds out you are——

PROTHERO. I'll start him to-morrow before he gets a chance. I'll see to that. And once I get him on the other side of the world, it's hard if my little cherub and I between us can't keep him there. Hush, Lady Clarabut. I'll introduce the future Mrs. Bailey Prothero.

Re-enter PALMER, *showing in* LADY CLARABUT *and* NINA.

PALMER (*announces*). Lady Clarabut and Miss Clarabut. (*Exit* PALMER.)

LADY C. I told you I should call, Mr. Prothero. Miss Jenison! (*Showing a little surprise.*)

PROTHERO. Yes. You are aware that I have lately taken advantage of my extraordinary powers to make some very profitable speculations. My nervous system is completely shattered, and I have therefore decided to spend the evening of my life in dignified retirement in—in Park Lane, surrounded by my friends and those whom I have helped to prosperity. I shall need some one to entertain my friends—Miss Jenison has done me the honour to promise to become Mrs. Bailey Prothero.

LADY C. I congratulate you—I congratulate you both.

MISS J. Good-bye, Lady Clarabut.

LADY C. Good-bye.

MISS J. Good-bye, Nina.

NINA. Good-bye.

(MISS JENISON *kisses* NINA, *who is a little surprised, but accepts the kiss without returning it.*)

Enter PALMER.

PALMER. Mr. Lambert.

Enter GEORGE, *looks a little surprised at seeing* MISS JENISON.

PROTHERO. May I present you to my future wife, Miss Jenison?

GEORGE. How d'ye do, Miss Jenison?

(*Shaking hands.*)

MISS J. Won't you congratulate me, Mr. Lambert?

GEORGE (*forced to say it*). I—I congratulate you.

(*A little awkward pause.*)

PROTHERO. My brougham is in the stables—I'll get you a cab, dear.

(*Exit, followed by* MISS JENISON, *who turns and looks at* GEORGE *as she goes off.*)

GEORGE (*follows her a step or two, then turns to look at* LADY CLARABUT *and* NINA, *who by look and gesture express that they share his astonishment*). This is a strange move on the part of our friend—(*Advances,*

shakes hands with LADY CLARABUT *and* NINA.) Is this the first you have heard about it?

LADY C. Yes. He has been a good deal lately at my sister's with Tommy, but I had no idea Miss Jenison was the attraction. However, it's a very good match for her, and I don't blame her. The man has really made a heap of money. I met him at dinner the other night at Lord Winchendon's——

GEORGE. He dines at Lord Winchendon's?

LADY C. The rascal dines everywhere. Lord Winchendon made five thousand pounds out of the tip he gave him that night. He shall dine with me at the same rate, every night of the year. That's what I've come about.

GEORGE. Then you're bitten at last?

LADY C. My dear Mr. Lambert, for the last four months I have gone about priding myself upon my moral superiority to all my friends in keeping aloof from this dreadful speculation. Meantime all my friends have been making fortunes, and now I find myself out in the cold with empty pockets.

NINA. You have your moral superiority, mamma.

LADY C. No, my dear. It's all used up. I've reconsidered the whole matter, and I've come to the conclusion that gambling is only immoral when you lose. If everybody always won, gambling would be a great national pension fund for all of us. Therefore, to the extent that you win, gambling is a virtue. I'm going to practise that virtue.

Re-enter PROTHERO.

LADY C. Mr. Prothero has promised to give me some information about this new investment bank of his.

PROTHERO. Delighted, Lady Clarabut. If you'll step this way. (*Going to door*, R.)

(LADY CLARABUT *hesitates, glances at* GEORGE *and* NINA.)

PROTHERO. You wish for Mr. Lambert's advice again? I hoped by this time I had convinced both you and Mr. Lambert.

LADY C. Oh, it's not that. But—can't you give me the information here?

PROTHERO. No. I wish to give you facts and figures. (*He opens door; she still hesitates.*) You needn't hesitate. A good many thousand pounds have been made in this little den the last few months. (*Pointing in.*) Will you walk in?

(*She enters. He looks back at* GEORGE *and* NINA *as he goes in after her.*)

GEORGE. This man puzzles me more and more. I'm sure he's a thorough rogue, and yet——

NINA. And yet?

GEORGE. He prospers.

NINA. Oh, but that's a very old experience, isn't it?

GEORGE. Yes. But it's terribly discouraging to people who wish to be honest—that is, if there is any living for honest men in this world.

NINA. Ah, don't say that! You've been very successful so far, and I'm sure you've been honest.

GEORGE. Yes, up to the present I've kept thoroughly honest. Miss Clarabut, give me your advice——

NINA. Advice to a lawyer? Isn't that your own speciality? Isn't that what you sell to other people?

GEORGE. Yes, but I don't ask you to sell this. Give it to me, and I promise you I'll act upon it.

NINA. Tell me the circumstances.

GEORGE. This man has been at me the last four months. He has offered to put me on to what he calls "good things." He has sent for me to-day to offer me business connected with this company of his, —which I believe to be not very much removed from a swindle. You see the fix I'm in. I want to make money. You know why. I want to win the girl I love. If I were rich and successful I think her father and mother would give her to me in spite of the uncertainty about my people. But I don't want to make money in a left-handed way?

NINA. And this would be a left-handed way?

GEORGE. Yes. This Prothero knows I suspect him. That's the reason he's so confoundedly civil to me. He wants to inveigle me into his speculations; he wants to buy me, so that he can shut my mouth if I get to know anything about him.

NINA. Very well. Don't let him buy you. Though every man has his price—Isn't that so?

GEORGE. No, that's not so! There's no price would buy me, if I knew that *she* would despise me if I sold myself.

NINA. If she's a nice girl, she'd rather wait a little longer and know that it was all quite—quite on the square.

GEORGE. Thank you. It shall be all quite—quite on the square.

Re-enter LADY CLARABUT *and* PROTHERO.

LADY C. Very well, Mr. Prothero. I'll take your advice.

PROTHERO. Understand me, I do not guarantee you these large profits. Those who take my opinion do so entirely at their own risk.

LADY C. Oh, I'm quite prepared to lose my money.

GEORGE. I hope you're not going to speculate largely, Lady Clarabut.

LADY C. Yes, I've made up my mind to have one tremendous flutter—don't you call it?—and then stop. Come, Nina.

PROTHERO. I wish you and Miss Clarabut would dine with me one evening, and go to the play.

NINA. Oh, we're full for next week, aren't we, mamma?

PROTHERO. The week after, then. Perhaps Mr. Lambert would join us? Will you fix an evening?

LADY C. What evening are we disengaged, Nina?

NINA. Your book is at home—hadn't we better leave it? (*Glances inquiringly at* GEORGE.)

GEORGE. I fear I cannot promise.

(PROTHERO *shows disappointment.*)

LADY C. I'll look at my engagement book, Mr. Prothero, and let you know.

PROTHERO (*to* NINA, *detaining her*). You never gave me an opportunity of telling you what your future will be.

NINA. What will it be?

PROTHERO. A very happy one, I hope, with all my heart. I should like to think that I had helped to make it so!

NINA. I don't see how that is possible.

PROTHERO. If Lady Clarabut's venture turns out well, as I feel sure it will, will you remember that I wished for your happiness, and that I did all I could to bring it about? (*Offering his hand.*)

NINA (*takes hand, not very cordially*). Thank you, that's kind of you. (PROTHERO *rings bell.*)

LADY C. (*shaking hands with* GEORGE). Now, Nina, we'll drive to Mr. Reffell's and make the plunge. If I lose—oh!

GEORGE. What then?

LADY C. I shall hold my tongue, reassume my moral superiority, and think what a very foolish woman I've been.

GEORGE. And if you win?

(PALMER *appears at door.*)

LADY C. Then I shall invest my winnings in Consols, reassume my moral superiority, and think what a very clever woman I've been. Wish me luck, Mr. Lambert!

(*Exeunt* LADY CLARABUT *and* NINA, *followed by* PALMER.)

PROTHERO (*watches them off, then very cordially to* GEORGE). Sit down, Mr. Lambert. I'm sorry you couldn't come to lunch.

GEORGE. I was engaged.

PROTHERO. You generally are engaged when I invite you.

GEORGE. Yes—unfortunately.

PROTHERO. What can I offer you? Coffee? Liqueur? Whisky and soda?

GEORGE. Nothing, thank you.

PROTHERO. You smoke?

GEORGE. If you don't mind.

PROTHERO (*offering cigars*). Try these—they're rather special.

GEORGE (*taking out cigar-case from his own pocket*). Thank you, I always smoke one particular sort, and those I carry with me. (GEORGE *lights cigar.* PROTHERO *shows that he is hurt.*) Now, Mr. Prothero!

PROTHERO. I've been speaking about you to our lawyers. I've asked them to put all the business they can in your way.

GEORGE. Thank you. (*A little pause.*)

PROTHERO. If you have a few hundreds or thousands lying idle, buy as many as you can of our Bank shares.

GEORGE. Thank you, I daren't risk the little money that I have saved.

PROTHERO. It's no risk. They must go up. And I'll tell you when to sell out.

GEORGE. Thank you, I never speculate.

(*Pause.* PROTHERO *shows vexation.*)

PROTHERO. Then you won't allow me to do you a good turn?

GEORGE. Oh yes. But first of all, why do you wish to do me a good turn?

PROTHERO. I don't understand you.

GEORGE. Either one of two things, Mr. Prothero. Either you are acting from pure kindness and goodness of heart towards a stranger—or—you are acting from interested motives.

PROTHERO. You don't think I could act from pure kindness and goodness of heart towards a young fellow whom I like, a fine-spirited, handsome young fellow —(*laying his hand affectionately on* GEORGE'S *shoulder*) —who can look the world in the face—(GEORGE *edges away from him with a movement of repulsion*)—I want to help you! I want to advance you in the world! I want you to marry this girl. Didn't you notice how I got the old lady out of the way just now? I want you to be happy and rich and powerful! And I'll show you the way! I like you, and I respect you!

Can't you try to like me and respect me a little? Can't you trust me?

(*Again affectionately laying his hand on* GEORGE'S *shoulder. Again* GEORGE *moves away.*)

GEORGE. Give me some reason for respecting and trusting you. Show me that you are an upright, honourable man, and I'll ask your pardon, and own that I've been mistaken in you.

PROTHERO. Then you don't think I am an upright, honourable man?

GEORGE (*firmly*). No, Mr. Prothero, I don't.

PROTHERO (*shows pain*). Why not?

GEORGE. I'll be quite frank with you. I'll lay all my cards on the table. You remember the first night I met you at Lady Dovergreen's?

PROTHERO. Yes.

GEORGE. You told me several things about my childhood which impressed me very deeply. I called the next day and asked you how you became possessed of your information.

PROTHERO. Well, I told you.

GEORGE. That you had a peculiar gift of seeing the past and the future, and by that mysterious power you saw things that had happened to me over twenty years ago?

PROTHERO. Yes.

GEORGE. Do you still give me that explanation?

PROTHERO (*slight pause*). Yes.

(GEORGE *smiles and shrugs his shoulders.*)

PROTHERO (*rather angrily*). You don't believe me?

GEORGE. No, I don't, Mr. Prothero.

PROTHERO (*comes up to him, threateningly*). You tell me I'm a liar!—How dare you——

(*Takes a turn or two very angrily.*)

GEORGE. I'll tell you why I don't believe you. I tested you about my later life. I found you thoroughly, hopelessly at sea. I sent other people to test you——

PROTHERO. You laid a trap for me?

GEORGE. A trap, Mr. Prothero? Isn't it your business? Don't you challenge inquiry?

PROTHERO. Whom did you send?

GEORGE. Don't you know? Can't you tell me? Colonel Vanstone, Sir John Leeming, Mrs. Enderfield. You were hopelessly, thoroughly at sea in every case.

PROTHERO. My powers sometimes fail me.

GEORGE. Just so. They do. They fail you at the exact point at which you don't know and can't give a good guess.

PROTHERO. So you tell me to my face that I'm a swindler and a liar!

GEORGE. Do you claim that you have this extraordinary power?—(*He pauses.*) Yes or no, Mr. Prothero?

PROTHERO. Yes! (*A little firmer.*) Yes! Yes!

GEORGE. And you knew the events of my childhood by that power and that alone? (PROTHERO *falters.*) Be careful—yes or no?

PROTHERO. Yes. Don't I tell you? Yes! Yes!

GEORGE (*rises quietly, takes up his hat*). Thank you. Good-day, Mr. Bailey Prothero.

PROTHERO. No—(*stops him*). Why do you come here and insult me? Sit down! I tell you I have this power! Can't you see the evidences of it? Look all round! I'm coining money! I'm making my thousands! I'm giving fortunes to all my friends. Isn't that sufficient answer? Won't you come in with me, you young fool?

GEORGE. Thank you for showing me your hand so plainly, Mr. Prothero. But I'm not to be bought.

PROTHERO. Bought!

GEORGE. You know that I see through you,—you offer me this chance of feathering my nest, to shut my mouth. But I tell you plainly, I think I have a better game to play, I think it will answer my purpose better in the long run to keep clear of you and expose you for the rogue I know you to be.

PROTHERO. What?!

Enter MISS JENISON, *shown in by* PALMER, *who withdraws.*

MISS J. (*a pause*). What is the matter?

GEORGE (*looks from one to the other*). Miss Jenison, you were a friend of my aunt.

MISS J. No, only a very slight acquaintance.

GEORGE. Did you ever hear her speak of my father or mother?

MISS J. No.

GEORGE. And you had no personal knowledge of them yourself.

MISS J. Not the least. Why?

GEORGE. You know how necessary it is for me to know all about my parents.

MISS J. I wish I could help you. I'm sorry I can't.

GEORGE. Good-bye.

MISS J. Good-bye.

(*Shaking hands.* GEORGE *is going.*)

GEORGE (*turns at door*). I think I ought to tell you, Mr. Prothero, that I have been making some inquiries about you.

Enter PALMER.

PALMER. The shabby party has come back, sir, and says he must see you at once.

Enter CUSHING, *shaven, with a respectable tall hat, and an overcoat which does not fit him. He gives a glance of surprised recognition at* MISS JENISON, *bows to her.* GEORGE *is watching.*

PROTHERO (*to* CUSHING). What the devil do you mean by coming in here?

CUSHING. Beg pardin', *Mr. Bailey Prothero*

(*with significant emphasis*). I found this onvelope in the pocket of the overcoat you was kind enough to give me——

PROTHERO (*takes envelope, destroys it*). Take this man into your pantry, Palmer. I'll speak to him downstairs.

(PALMER *points off.* CUSHING *makes an elaborate bow to* MISS JENISON. *She takes no notice.* GEORGE *is watching keenly. Exit* CUSHING, *followed by* PALMER.)

GEORGE (*is following quickly*). Good-day, Mr. Prothero.

PROTHERO (*stops him*). No, one moment, Mr. Lambert. Let me understand. You have been making inquiries about me?

GEORGE. I have tried to learn all I can about your previous career.

PROTHERO. Indeed. And how much have you learned?

GEORGE. Up to the present next to nothing. But I shall continue my inquiries till I do learn something. Good-day. (*Going.*)

PROTHERO (*rings bell*). You'll find you are very much mistaken in me. I hope you'll learn to know me better.

GEORGE (*shrugs shoulders significantly*). I hope so, Mr. Prothero. I sincerely hope so. I hope I shall get to know you very well indeed, and be the means of letting other people know you too! (*Exit.*)

PROTHERO (*enraged*). He insults me! He threatens me! The young cub, I'll read him a lesson! I'll teach him to love and respect me—he shall—or, if he won't, damn him, let him rake out the past, and let it come tumbling down over his head and ears as well as mine! I'll—I'll——

(*Standing angrily at door, looking after* GEORGE.)

MISS J. (*goes to him very appealingly*). Dear, be ruled by me! Cushing has found you out! George suspects you! Our house of cards is tumbling! Let's go while we have time!

PROTHERO. Turn tail? Not I!

MISS J. Yes! Yes! We've enough to make us happy for all our life in some place where we are not known. Let's take it, and leave London at once. If we stay we shall be discovered and disgraced! George, listen to me! Our luck has gone! This is the end of it! I know I'm right! Something warns me that——

PROTHERO (*fiercely*). Shut him up! Put him in his box! I'll have none of that! (*Gesture of despair and resignation from* MISS JENISON.) (*Very tenderly.*) Lizzie, don't give way, old girl! Don't be a wet blanket on me now, just as I've got the world at my feet—yes, the world, for London is the world, and I'm leading all the fools in London by the nose! Can't you see them dancing to my tune? (*She looks at him frightened*). Buck up, old girl! Buck up!

You drank to our past! Drink to our future! I'll get rid of that beast Cushing! I'll knock the sawdust out of Master George! We'll take this house in Park Lane! You shall have carriages, gee-gees, dresses, toggery, diamonds, anything you please! My luck isn't going to change! It can't! It shan't! My little cherub's up there looking after me! Here's good luck to my luck! I'll stick to my luck!

(*She stands looking at him frightened.*)

CURTAIN.

(*Six months pass between Acts II. and III.*)

ACT III

SCENE—RECEPTION-ROOMS AT NO. 56 PARK LANE

A very handsome drawing-room with two archways at back, showing an inner drawing-room, and behind that a conservatory. Between the archways a fire-place, with fire lighted. A door down stage R. *The whole brilliantly lighted and handsomely furnished.*

Discover PALMER, *now the butler.*

First Footman *enters hurriedly through* L. *archway, with account in his hand.*

FOOTMAN. Here's another pretty go! The florist has sent round his bill with this here message, if you please. "Master's compliments to Mr. Bailey Prothero, and Mr. Bailey Prothero can't have any more flowers unless Mr. Bailey Prothero sends the money for what he's had already."

PALMER. What did you do?

FOOTMAN. I tried to cod him. I says, "What

do you mean by your impidence?" I says. "We're giving a grand reception to-night," I says, "and we must have the flowers. You go and fetch them this very instant," I says, "and this will be the last time that we shall patronise your establishment."

PALMER. What did he say?

FOOTMAN. He laid his finger on the tip of his nose, gave vent to an ironic smile, and carted off the flowers without so much as saying a word.

PALMER. I tell you what, William Chubb, it's all U. P. with Bailey Prothero.

FOOTMAN. I'm afraid it is, Mr. Palmer.

PALMER. I've seen it coming for months, William, ever since we married, and set up in Park Lane. But I didn't expect the smash would come so sudden as this.

FOOTMAN. And on the night of our reception too!

PALMER. This reception is a plant, William, to throw dust in people's eyes, and keep up the impression that we are flourishing as usual. I heard him talking it over to her on the night of the slump. He says, "We'll give a big night reception, and we'll ask every blessed swell we know," he says; "we must keep the ball rolling," he says.

FOOTMAN. He is a corker, ain't he? Has he come in yet?

PALMER. No, not unless he's sneaked in by the back staircase. (*Indicating* R.) Curious his not coming in to dinner. He'll have to look sharp.

(*Taking out watch.*) He's got to dress yet, and the folks will be coming in half an hour.

FOOTMAN. Where's she?

PALMER (*points to door*, R.). In there with her nose glued to the window-panes, watching for him.

FOOTMAN. Hadn't I better take this bill in to her?

PALMER. What's the good? I know she ain't got any, for I heard her greening her milliner this afternoon.

Enter from archway Second Footman, *with paper in hand.*

SEC. FOOT. Have you seen this? They do let him have it.

PALMER (*takes paper, looks down*, First Footman *looking on*). Phew! My eye! That's hot! Don't they give it to him!

SEC. FOOT. Gunter's chaps are talking about it downstairs. They say he ain't no better nor a common swindler. (*Exit at archway*, L.)

PALMER (*reading paper*). Ho! Ho! Ho! I say! I say! William, there will be a big bust up at 56 Park Lane before long.

FIRST FOOT. What about our wages?

PALMER. Oh, we shall be all right. Bailey Prothero may be the biggest swindler that ever walked the earth, but he does chuck his money about. I will say that for him. It may not be his own, but he does chuck it about.

FIRST FOOT. When he's got it; but if he ain't got it, he can't chuck it about. And I begin to think our wages look fishy.

PALMER. Think so, William?

(*Looks grave and anxious.*)

FIRST FOOT. Nobody paid, can't even raise a tenner. I've a good mind to——

PALMER. What?

FIRST FOOT. Ask for my last month's wages, and if I don't get 'em, strike, and let myself loose amongst the champagne and Gunter's things. (*Exit.*)

Enter, R., MISS JENISON, *now* MRS. PROTHERO, *in handsome evening dress with jewels; her face showing signs of great distress and anxiety.*

MRS. P. (*eagerly*). Hasn't Mr. Prothero returned, Palmer?

PALMER. No, ma'am, he has not.

MRS. P. (*anxiously*). Where can he be? Where can he be?

PALMER. Ah! Just so! Oh, where, and oh, where can he be? That's what a good many folks would like to know.

MRS. P. (*startled by his manner, turns round*). Eh?

PALMER. Look here, ma'am. I don't want to make myself nasty, if it can be anyways avoided. I've lived in some of the best and some of the queerest families in London——

MRS. P. What has this to do with me?

PALMER. So long as my wages are paid and I'm treated well, I don't inquire into your private characters. You may be as religious and as psalm-singing as you please; or you may be no better than a set of swindlers—that ain't my business——

MRS. P. What am I to understand by this?

PALMER. That there ain't no reception here to-night unless I get my wages first.

MRS. P. Mr. Prothero shall attend to you.

PALMER. I hope so, ma'am. I shall want some of his attention.

MRS. P. How dare you, sir? How dare you?

PALMER. All right, ma'am! You're only winding yourself up for nothing. There's all the servants ready to chuck it up and go on the rampage if I only tip 'em the wink. But you square me—there's plenty of things about—you ain't parted with all your jewellery—you square me, and I'll see you through to-night.

MRS. P. Go downstairs, sir! Go downstairs!

PALMER (*seating himself comfortably in armchair*). Thank you. This is good enough for me.

(*She looks at him, bursts into tears,* R.)

PALMER (*looks at her, suddenly jumps up, comes to her*). I beg your pardon, ma'am. I didn't mean it. You trust to me. I'll keep them in order downstairs. I'll see you through to-night at any rate. You trust to me. (*Exit through* L. *archway.*)

PROTHERO *in frock-coat and overcoat creeps on through archway*, R. *He is very pale, haggard, disordered, eyes rather wild.*

MRS. P. (*goes up to him very tenderly*). George! (*He takes no notice.*) George! (*He laughs.*) George! What is it, dear? (PROTHERO *turns round.*)

PROTHERO. The game's up, Lizzie! My little cherub's tumbled off his perch. I can't raise a sixpence.

MRS. P. What can we do?

PROTHERO. Whatever you like. I'm good for anything and anywhere. We shall have to make a bolt. What fresh countries would you like to see, eh? Italy? Russia? Australia? — or Kingdom-come?

MRS. P. George, you don't mean that!

PROTHERO. Why not! As I drove along the Embankment this afternoon, the water looked rather chilly and very pea-soupy, but otherwise there was no objection to it. Why not, Lizzie? Why not? We've had a jolly good time of it together. We've eaten our cake—That reminds me,—I've had no dinner.

MRS. P. (*rings bell*). Dear, you're faint and hungry——

PROTHERO. No, not hungry—I'm past that. My tongue's like a bit of dried leather. I haven't had a morsel in my lips since I left home this morning.

Enter PALMER.

MRS. P. Lay some dinner for Mr. Prothero in the morning-room.

PROTHERO. No, Palmer, a snack of something on a tray. Bring it here, and a bottle of champagne. Sharp! (*Exit* PALMER.)

MRS. P. My poor dear, what have you been doing all day?

PROTHERO. Racing all over London, trying to raise the wind. What a fool I was not to take your advice and sell out when Lady Clarabut did. What a fool I was! But everything was booming. I could foresee a good many things, why the devil couldn't I foresee this confounded slump, and all the troubles out there? Why couldn't I, Lizzie?

MRS. P. Have you been to all of them?

PROTHERO. Yes. It's no use. My luck's gone, and the beggars know it. Not at home here, not at home there! Kept waiting an hour at one place, and as good as kicked out at another. Lord Winchendon didn't want to see me, but—he did. My bank put him on his legs. He made thirty thousand pounds out of it, and married his daughter on the strength of it. "This is most unfortunate, Mr. Prothero, but I always felt that the crash must come." "Can't you advance me a few thousands, Lord Winchendon, just to tide me over this slump?" "I'm very sorry, but really agricultural depression has swallowed every

available sixpence, really it has. I'm so sorry. Good evening." "Good evening!" I sent him off with a flea in his ear. They're all alike. The men who grovelled to me three months ago won't know me to-day. That dirty little snob Oberstein—he lickspittled me for a dinner—why even he cut me!

Enter PALMER, *with a tray of sandwiches and a bottle of champagne.*

MRS. P. Now, dear! come and eat something!

PROTHERO. What have you got there, Palmer?

PALMER. Sardine sandwich, quails in aspic, and a bottle of the eighty-four champagne.

PROTHERO (*takes out purse with notes*). By the way, Palmer, Mrs. Prothero and I may be going for a long voyage to-morrow.

PALMER. Indeed, sir!

PROTHERO. In case I should forget it, take these - ten, twenty, thirty—that will about settle all the wages that are due. Pay yourself and the others, and thank them for Mrs. Prothero and me.

PALMER. Thank you, sir! (*Going.*) You are aware that it's half-past nine, sir, and the reception is for ten?

PROTHERO. I shall be ready, Palmer.

(*Exit* PALMER.)

MRS. P. Come, dear! eat something!

PROTHERO. I'm not hungry. I can drink, though!

(*Drinks; looks round the room.*) Pretty room, isn't it? (*Laughs.*) Pretty decorations! By the way, did we ever pay that man's bill?

MRS. P. George, don't you think we'd better postpone the reception?

PROTHERO. Postpone it? What for? We may never get the chance of going to another. I don't fancy many of them will turn up, but I won't disappoint those who do. (*Drinking.*) I feel better. What a good friend wine is! Now, let's face the situation! That little snob, Oberstein, cut me.

MRS. P. Mrs. Oberstein passed me in Bond Street yesterday, and wouldn't recognise me.

PROTHERO. We've grown too self-indulgent in these matters, Lizzie. We've become epicures in the esteem of our neighbours. I've known the time when I could have borne the disrespect of all London without flinching. I've known the time when, if any common ordinary policeman had cut me dead, I shouldn't have cared a jot. Living in Park Lane has demoralised us, sapped our sturdy native virtue, Lizzie. It's perhaps as well we should be making a move. The question is—where? You don't fancy Kingdom-come; neither do I, after three glasses of champagne.

MRS. P. George, you're not drinking too much?

PROTHERO (*elated, and steadied by the wine*). Too much? Not me! You've known me take a good deal, but did you ever know me take too much?

That's one of the blessings Providence has bestowed upon me—a good stomach and a good brain for my liquor. Look at my hand! (*Holding out his hand.*) It's as steady as a rock. However much I may take, my hand won't shake, and my heart won't quake in the morning. I'm dropping into poetry! Things are rosier, Lizzie. You've got all your jewels on?

MRS. P. All that I have left.

PROTHERO. Don't take 'em off. Wear 'em constantly about you, in case of accident; do you hear? (*She nods.*) I've realised everything I could put my hand on. After all, things aren't so bad, Lizzie! A year ago to-day we were worth nothing at all; to-day, with your jewels, and what I've got here (*tapping pocket*), we are worth some seven or eight hundred pounds—that is, if we can get clear away with it, which we will. (*Winks at her.*) Let us glue ourselves to this fact, Lizzie—we are seven or eight hundred pounds better off to-day than we were twelve months ago. Meantime we have had a jolly year, and I'm going to have one more jolly evening before it's all over. Now I must go and dress. Come! Buck up, old girl! My little cherub's on his perch again. (*Kisses her tenderly.*) Buck up! Buck up! Let 'em come, I'm ready for 'em!

(*Exit by* R. *archway, and off* R.)

Enter PALMER, L. *archway, announcing* MR. LAMBERT.
Enter GEORGE.

(*Exit* PALMER.)

GEORGE (*shaking hands*). You'll excuse my coming now. I'm not going to stay.

MRS. P. (*disappointed*). Not going to stay?

GEORGE. No, I wish to have a word or two with you alone. I've heard of Mr. Prothero's losses. I came to say how sorry I am for *you*.

MRS. P. Thank you.

GEORGE. You were kind to me when I was struggling and unknown. I owe what little success I have won to you. (*Her face apart from him shows intense pleasure.*) And indirectly I owe it to you that I may gain the dearest hope of my life.

MRS. P. Sir William and Lady Clarabut have accepted you?

GEORGE. Not absolutely. But they make me welcome, and I feel sure they'll give me Nina, if nothing turns up to show that I'm an undesirable son-in-law.

MRS. P. (*shows pain at his last words, then turns to him*). I'm so glad. I wish you happiness with all my heart (*shaking hands warmly*)—with all my heart.

GEORGE. You make me very uncomfortable.

MRS. P. Why?

GEORGE. I came to—I scarcely know how to say

it—to put you on your guard? You married this man suddenly, knowing almost nothing of him.

MRS. P. Go on.

GEORGE. Mrs. Prothero, I am on the point of tracing all his former life. At any moment I may be able to prove that he is something worse than an impostor.

MRS. P. What have you learned? Tell me—please tell me. I can bear it.

GEORGE. He was connected some years ago with a band of long-firm swindlers. They used many aliases. I don't know which name represents your husband, but one of them does. (*She shows great concern.*) Forgive me. I know what a blow this must be to you. I wouldn't have come at this moment, but I thought, now the bank has collapsed and he may be brought to account for that, I thought that if you needed a friend, if it became advisable for you to seek another home for a time——

MRS. P. Thank you. Even if what you say is true, I shall never leave him. He is my husband, whatever he is.

GEORGE. Then I can do nothing for you?

MRS. P. Yes. You say I've done you a kindness. May I beg this favour of you, that if your suspicions should prove to be correct, you won't press matters against him for the present?

GEORGE. I promise you I'll take no measures against him without giving him fair warning.

MRS. P. Thank you! That's all I ask!

GEORGE (*takes her hand*). Good-night, Mrs. Prothero. I'm very sorry for *you*. Rely on me to do nothing against *you*.

(*He kisses her hand. Exit through archway*, L.)

MRS. P. (*stretches out her hands after him with a vain longing gesture three times*). My son! My son! My son!

Re-enter PROTHERO, *in evening dress.*

PROTHERO. Now, Liz, I'm as right as a trivet again. What's the matter with you?

MRS. P. George has been here.

PROTHERO. Good. Did you give him a copy of the fifth commandment?

MRS. P. He says that he's on the point of tracing you out—at any moment he may discover everything——

PROTHERO (*startled for a moment, then very calm*). Good.

MRS. P. George, let us get away at once—before——

PROTHERO. Not me. I'm going to stay and fight it out. I've got a game to play yet, Liz—and I'm going to play it. I've had just enough of Master George. I've tried to be friends with him. I've tried to make him love me. But he'll have nothing to do with me. Very well. I'm content. We'll drop the

relationship. But don't let him meddle with me now, for if he does I'll blow the gaff to Lady Clarabut and knock him to smithereens! Shush!

Re-enter PALMER.

PALMER. I beg pardon, sir,—that shabby party that found your diamond stud——

PROTHERO. What of him?

PALMER. He's been hanging about the place all the evening, and he says——

Enter CUSHING *at archway* L., *dressed in a cheap ready-made grey tweed frock suit, a red satin tie, and a black silk hat, very low in the crown and very wide and much curled in the brim.*

CUSH. (*in altercation with* First Footman, *who appears*). Oh yes, he will; Mr. Bailey Prothero will see his old friend R. C., won't you, Mr. Bailey Prothero?

PROTHERO. Yes, you blackguard.

(*Motions to* PALMER *and* Footman *to withdraw.*)

CUSH. Blackguard, Georgy? Did I understand you to use the word "blackguard"?

PROTHERO. Yes, you blackguard. How dare you show your face here, after robbing me and selling me as you've done?

CUSH. Robbing you, Georgy? After all your

kindness! Oh, don't think so bad of me, Georgy! Call me a blackguard, and I'll put up with it—if I must. But don't call me a thief! I borrowed that last two hundred quid.

PROTHERO. You stole it. I sent it to you in strict confidence to apply to a certain purpose.

CUSH. To the nobbling of sich and sich parties—Well, dear old pal, I applied it to a better purpose, viz. to keep myself out of quod.

PROTHERO. Quod?

CUSH. I'm wanted in Johannesburg.

PROTHERO. They must be in a bad way out there to want you. What for?

CUSH. What for? That's it, dear old pal—what for? I dun know! Gracious goodness! Well! There!—with such luck as I've had, I might be wanted for anything, or everything.

PROTHERO. What have you told Sydenham about me?

CUSH. Sydenham? You don't sispect me, Georgy, of any hanky-panky with him?

PROTHERO. I've had a letter from him this morning. I can't understand it unless you've been blabbing my business to him. But he'll be here to-night, and then I shall know.

CUSH. O Lord—Gracious goodness—Well! There! I ain't told him anything, Georgy, but of course he might have guessed things—for instance as it was you as sent me out there———

PROTHERO. You blackguard, you've sold me to him. Be off.

CUSH. Wait a bit, Georgy.

PROTHERO. Be off.

CUSH. Look here, Georgy, or I should say (*turns suddenly vicious*) Mr. George Jackman. (*Raising his voice.*) If you don't assist me in my troubles, Mr. George Jackman, I shall be compelled to take the first chance, Mr. George Jackman, to inform——

PROTHERO. Stop, you fool, unless you want to get yourself five years as well as me. (*Goes to archway, looks off, comes back, points* R.) Go in there.

Enter PALMER.

PALMER. Are you ready to receive visitors, sir.

PROTHERO (*to* CUSHING). Go in there. (*Pointing* R.) Do you hear? Go in there!

(*Exit* CUSHING *door* R. *very sulkily.*)

PROTHERO (*to* PALMER). Are the people coming, Palmer?

PALMER. Only Sir Thomas Dovergreen. He's talking to Mrs. Prothero at the head of the stairs.

PROTHERO. Palmer, get William and Frank to help you. Take that blackguard (*pointing* R.) by the scruff of the neck, pitch him down the backstairs, and kick him along the street *ad lib.*

PALMER. Yes, sir. (*Beckons at archway. The*

two Footmen *enter.*) This way, we've got a little job on here.

(*Exeunt* PALMER, WILLIAM, *and* FRANK *door* R. PROTHERO *listens, chuckles, listens, opens door* R., *bursts into laughter; in the middle of it enter* TOMMY *at archway* L., *very pale, seedy, and woe-begone.*)

PROTHERO (*stops laughing, closes door* R., *looks at* TOMMY, *who stands in middle of room*). Hillo, what's the matter with you?

TOMMY. I'm not well. Ever since the slump everything has disagreed with me. I've lived in druggists' shops the last fortnight. I've taken every pill and pick-me-up there is. (*With sudden futile rage.*) I tell you this, Mr. Bailey Prothero, I'm in an awful state. Look at my tongue.

(*Putting out tongue.*)

PROTHERO. Ah! Appetite not good?

TOMMY. Appetite! (*Shouting.*) Look here, Mr. Bailey Prothero, you're the cause of all this, you and your confounded bank! My trustees and my lawyers have been all through my affairs, and I tell you this, my friend, they called you everything except an honest man.

PROTHERO. Did they? Dear! Dear!

TOMMY. Do you know what I shall have to do? I shall have to go and live in some cheap Continental hole on a hundred and fifty a year for the next seven

or eight years. (*Very piteously.*) What did you do it for, eh, Bailey?

PROTHERO. It was part of my system.

TOMMY. To let me in?

PROTHERO. Certainly.

TOMMY. What for? I don't see it! Why not let somebody else in, and give me a chance of clearing out, eh?

PROTHERO. I must be allowed to work my system in my own way.

TOMMY. System! What system?

PROTHERO (*turning up the sleeve of his dress-coat slightly*). You don't see anything up my sleeve?

TOMMY. By Jove! Bailey, what do you mean?

(PROTHERO *winks at him very elaborately with both eyes, then goes away.*)

TOMMY (*following him up*). You old devil, what are you up to now?

PROTHERO. Take a glass of champagne!

(*Pouring it out.*)

TOMMY. I daren't—I've had two brandy and sodas—I'm off my feed, and champagne doesn't agree with me when I'm off my feed—it flies to my head.

PROTHERO. Ah! if you've got a weak place it's always getting in the way. Take this!

TOMMY (*drinking*). But I say, Bailey, this system of yours? I don't quite tumble to it.

PROTHERO. Don't you? Sydenham is let in. I

expect him here to-night. Reffell is let in—he'll be here too. Lord Bicester is let in—I daresay he'll turn up.* Lord John would have been let in, but he hadn't a ha'penny to lose! Still I think he'll very likely come.

TOMMY. Well? Well? (PROTHERO *pours him out another glass; offers it.*) I say—ought I? I've got such a buzzing in my head. (*Drinking.*) This system, dear old boy! Do you think it will work?

PROTHERO. It is working. Did you see all the blackguard articles in the evening papers?

TOMMY. Yes.

PROTHERO. Well, what did you think of them?

TOMMY. Hot.

PROTHERO. Rather!

(*Rubs his hands gleefully and winks.*)

TOMMY. You don't mean to say——

PROTHERO (*nods*). All part of the system.

TOMMY. No, no! You don't say so! By Jove, Bailey, it's stupendous!

(*Stands looking at* PROTHERO *in stupid, half-tipsy amazement.* PROTHERO *taps his pockets as in second Act.* TOMMY *does same. There is no jingle of coin in either of them.* PROTHERO *laughs as in second Act;* TOMMY *does same. They stand laughing in chorus,* PROTHERO *grimly and sardonically.*)

TOMMY (*in a sudden blaze of admiration*). Dear

old Bailey! (*Collapses.*) I've got such a buzzing—I should like to sit down somewhere, all alone, and think over system.

(*Goes cautiously to sofa, and sits.*)

PROTHERO (*looks off* R., *calls*). Palmer!

Enter PALMER *and* Footman *through door* R.

PROTHERO. Send a messenger round to the Albany. Say that Sir Thomas has been taken ill, and ask his man to come and fetch him.

PALMER. Yes, sir. I beg pardon——

(*Glancing at* TOMMY, *who is reclining on sofa.*)

PROTHERO. Well? (*Coming down stage with* PALMER.)

PALMER (*confidentially*). We chucked the party out, sir, but as we was giving him a final kick, Mr. Lambert came up——

PROTHERO (*concerned*). Mr. Lambert?

PALMER. Yes, sir. He noticed the party coming in as he went out and I suppose he waited outside for him. Anyhow he came up when he heard the row and entered into conversation with him, and they've now gone off together.

PROTHERO. Mr. Lambert and that blackguard?

PALMER. Yes, sir. He did try to get hold of him that afternoon at Mount Street, only I locked him in my pantry.

PROTHERO. All right, Palmer.

(*Exit* PALMER.)

(PROTHERO *stands biting his thumb-nail.* LADY CLARABUT *and* MISS PROVE *appear in other room, which from this time gradually fills with guests.*)

MISS P. I really didn't expect to find anybody here.

LADY C. Oh, well, as I've made a fortune out of the man, I felt I must put in an appearance.

TOMMY (*on sofa*). Auntie!

(LADY CLARABUT *appears at archway.* TOMMY *turns face away.*)

PROTHERO. Delighted to see you, Lady Clarabut. I congratulate you very heartily on having made such good use of the advice I gave you.

LADY C. Yes, I trusted to your inner vision as to the right time of buying. And I trusted to my own inner vision as to the right time of selling. I'm really very much indebted to you. And, by the way—you'll forgive my speaking—I can't help hearing rumours—I hope they're not true.

PROTHERO (*taking a rose from the decorations, fixing it in his button-hole*). Rumours? About me? Rumours?

LADY C. Haven't you seen the evening papers?

PROTHERO. Really, I've been too busy. What do they say?

LADY C. Well, to put it plainly—you'll excuse me—they say you're in a mess.

PROTHERO. Ah, those papers! (*Fixing his buttonhole with great nonchalance.*) They will know one's business. They say I'm in a mess? They say I'm in a mess, do they? Dear me! What will they say next? (*Exit at archway.* LADY CLARABUT, *astonished, watches him off, then sees* TOMMY *on the sofa.*)

LADY C. Tommy—do you hear? Tommy! (*Shaking him.* TOMMY *turns round on sofa, with affectation of waking from sleep.*) What are you doing here?

TOMMY. Short nap, auntie—refresh myself. Think over Bailey's system.

LADY C. System?

TOMMY. Prothero has colossal system—make all our fortunes——

LADY C. Nonsense! Nonsense! There are some men in possession downstairs now.

TOMMY. Possibly that is part of system—I say, possibly.

LADY C. Ugh, you silly boy! How?

TOMMY (*speaking very slowly and precisely*). I—cannot—go into particulars—because—understand me, dear auntie—I am off my feed—and when I am off my feed, I always feel that I should like some one to sponge my head with cold water, very cold water—the colder the better.

LADY C. You wretched boy, what can I do with you?

Enter PALMER.

PALMER. If you please, Sir Thomas, your man Peters has come for you.

TOMMY. Peters? What for?—

PALMER. He says you are not well, and he has come——

TOMMY (*indignantly*). He says that I am not well —(*rises, very indignant*). By what authority does Peters say that I—(*sits down cautiously*) am not well?

LADY C. Ask Peters to come up—at once.

TOMMY. No—tell Peters to wait for me. I will discharge Peters. (*Motions* PALMER *off. Exit* PALMER.)

LADY C. Do you hear—get up! Get up and go away from this house before any one sees you in this state.

TOMMY. State? (*Rises with great dignity, mild voice.*) Auntie, by what authority do you prescribe rules for my conduct at a moment—when I am off my feed? (*Sits down.*)

LADY C. Because I'm a wise old woman, and you're a foolish young simpleton. Because you are flinging away your health by fast living, and your money by gambling, and I'm determined to save what there is left of the wreck—little as there is of it, and little as it's worth saving. Come, get up.

TOMMY. No, auntie. You accuse me of gambling at a moment when—(*growing indignant*)—you are

covered from head to foot with proceeds of gambling! You accuse me! How dare you accuse me!

LADY C. Because I have won and you have lost. Because I have invested my hard-earned winnings in railway bonds and Consols for the benefit of my family. Because now I have secured a snug little fortune, I don't intend to risk another farthing as long as I live. If that doesn't give me the right to preach against the evils of gambling I should like to know what does.

TOMMY (*shakes his head*). Auntie, I will content myself with simple remark that you are a downy old humbug, and whited sepulchre! (*Shakes his head at her sorrowfully.*) Whited sepulchre! Whited sepulchre!

LADY C (*goes to archway, calls off*). Palmer! (PALMER *appears.*) Is there a back staircase so that we can get him away without his being seen?

(TOMMY *rises indignantly.*)

PALMER. Yes, my lady—— (*Points off* R.)

TOMMY (*with solemn indignation*). Back staircase? Back staircase! (*Solemnly.*) Palmer, are you any party to back staircase?

PALMER. No, Sir Thomas.

TOMMY. Is Peters any party to back staircase?

PALMER. No, Sir Thomas. But don't you think as you aren't well you might as well toddle off—that way?

(TOMMY *looks very indignantly at* PALMER, *motions him away.*)

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TOMMY. Tell Peters to wait for me at front door and prepare cold bath for back of my head.

(*Exit* PALMER.)

TOMMY (*glaring at* LADY C.). Back staircase! Back staircase! Downy old humbug! Whited sepulchre! Back staircase!

(*He makes an exit at archway* R., *with great tipsy dignity, bows very politely to all the guests, is then seen to pass the other archway, bows politely, then finally pulling himself together with great dignity, he goes off* L., LADY CLARABUT *watching.* LADY CLARABUT *joins* Guests.)

PROTHERO *enters at archway* R., *thoughtful, anxious; stands a moment or two deliberating, as if arranging his plans.*

Enter L. *archway,* LORD JOHN. PROTHERO'S *features instantly change into a look of welcome.*

PROTHERO (*cordially*). Ah, Lord John?

LORD JOHN. One moment, my dear sir, will you oblige me by telling me whether the—dammy—game is over, or no?

PROTHERO. Over? On the contrary, Lord John, the game is just going to begin.

LORD JOHN. Oh! (*Still detaining him.*) Then will you further tell me what your next move is?

PROTHERO. My next move? hum! My next move will be a very striking one, Lord John.

LORD JOHN. Oh! do I stand in?

PROTHERO. Well, if you'd like to join me——

LORD JOHN. I should! Dammy! I should!

PROTHERO. You do stand in, Lord John, you do!

REFFELL *and* PINNIGER *have entered at archway.*

PROTHERO. Ah, here is our friend Reffell! And Pinniger!

(*Advances to meet them very cordially. They have entered very slowly and stiffly, and in evident bad temper.*)

PROTHERO. How do, Reffell? Mrs. Reffell is with you, I hope?

REFFELL (*stiffly and sulkily*). Mrs. Reffell is in the next room. But that is of no importance.

PROTHERO. Oh, don't say that! Don't say that!

Enter HUBBOCK *and* CHESTER, *both looking very grave.*

PROTHERO (*gaily*). Ah, Hubbock! Chester! (*They shake hands reluctantly.*) You seem upset, Hubbock.

HUBBOCK. I am upset. I have never in the whole course of my life been so much upset.

PROTHERO. Family troubles?

HUBBOCK (*indignantly*). No, sir.

THE MARQUIS OF BICESTER *is shown in at archway by* PALMER.

LORD B. (*has a halfpenny evening paper in his hand*). I must see Mr. Prothero at once.

PALMER. This way, my lord. (*Announces.*) Lord Bicester.

LORD B. I wish to speak to you, Mr. Prothero——

PROTHERO (*glancing into other room*). Draw the curtains, Palmer.

(PALMER *draws the curtains over the archways and exit.*)

PROTHERO. My dear Lord Bicester, I knew that you would come. (*Offers hand.*)

LORD B. (*stiffly*). Excuse me, Mr. Prothero, I have not.

PROTHERO. Excuse me, Lord Bicester, you are here.

LORD B. In one sense I am here. But in the sense of coming to a party, I am not here. (*Looking round to all.*) I wish that to be distinctly understood. I have come at the earliest moment to vindicate my character. Mr. Hubbock, Mr. Reffell, you will bear me witness that I distinctly required from Mr. Prothero the most positive assurances that the—a—thing was all right.

HUBBOCK. Certainly.

REFFELL. Yes, Lord Bicester, you did.

LORD B. Now, I find that the thing is not all right.

So far is it from being all right that I have lost fifteen thousand pounds. And what is much worse, I find myself attacked in the papers.

PROTHERO. Do you consider that worse than losing fifteen thousand pounds, Lord Bicester?

LORD B. Don't you think, sir, that a man's public honour is worth more than fifteen thousand pounds?

PROTHERO (*very coolly, back to fire*). Well. I would not sell mine for that sum. Still, we must all allow there are occasions, eh?—when—a sum of fifteen thousand pounds—eh?

LORD B. Read that. (*Giving him the paper.*)

PROTHERO. But this is a Radical paper. Is it worth while taking any notice of what Radical papers say, Lord Bicester?

LORD B. I regret to say that the abuse of myself is not confined to the organs of my political opponents. I read in a most respectable Conservative journal some exceedingly severe comments which seemed to point towards myself—at least, so I took them. Please to read that!

PROTHERO. (*reading*). "When we find amongst this crew—" (*looks round*) this crew—"a well-known hack company promoter whose every flotation is an act of organised brigandage——" Hubbock, my boy, that seems to point towards you—at least, so I take it.

HUBBOCK. I shall bring an action.

PROTHERO. I would! I would. (*Continuing.*)

"When we also find the worthless personalities, attached to titles, of a foolish young man about town" —Where is our friend Tommy? Oh, he is taking a cold bath—"a foolish young man about town—and a disreputable old man about town——"

LORD JOHN. That's me! That's me!

PROTHERO (*continuing*). "Whose life is a perfect pattern of what every decent man should avoid"—Lord John, I should say that is distinctly libellous.

LORD JOHN. Yes—a—the greater the truth—dammy—the greater the libel. Perfect pattern—(*whistle*)—perfect pattern!

LORD B. (*sternly*). Go on, sir, go on.

PROTHERO. One moment, Lord Bicester—I won't leave you out in the cold. "We are not surprised. But we do express our astonishment when we also find the name of a well-known member of the Stock Exchange. We ask whether that body has lost all sense of financial honour, or whether the self-respecting members of it will not instantly demand an inquiry into the conduct of——" (*Breaks off.*) Reffell, dear friend, that seems to point towards you—at least, so I take it.

REFFELL. It's infamous.

PROTHERO. It is.

LORD B. Go on, sir! Go on! If you please—— (*Sternly.*)

PROTHERO. I'm coming to you, Lord Bicester. (*Reads.*) "And what shall we say when we also find

in this disreputable company (*looking round*) the head of one of our oldest families——"

LORD B. Ah!

PROTHERO. "What idea can we gain, either of the intelligence——"

LORD B. Ah!

PROTHERO. "The patriotism——"

LORD B. Ah!

PROTHERO. "Or the honesty of our hereditary legislators." —You're right, Lord Bicester, that does seem to point to you—at least, so I take it.

LORD B. And I was most particular in my inquiries that the—a—thing was all right!

PROTHERO. You were. (*Reading.*) "But foolish, negligent, greedy, and incapable as all the members of this precious gang"—(*looking round*) this precious gang—"may have been in varying degrees, they seem to have been the mere puppets of this—of this" —the writer then goes on to make a few remarks which seem to point towards myself—at least, so I take it.

LORD B. Well?

REFFELL. Well?

HUBBOCK. Well?

PROTHERO. Well?

(*Gives the paper to* LORD JOHN, *who takes it and reads.*)

Enter SYDENHAM, *very angrily; comes up to* PROTHERO.

SYD. Mr. Bailey Prothero!

PROTHERO. How d'ye do? (*Offering hand.*)

SYD. (*angrily*). No, sir.

PROTHERO. Here's another gentleman who hasn't come to our party.

SYD. I want an explanation from you.

PROTHERO. Here's another gentleman who wants an explanation.

SYD. I noticed a very vulgar, over-dressed person following me all through my travels in the Cape and the Transvaal.

PROTHERO. Indeed!

SYD. On my landing yesterday the man borrowed a five-pound note from me on the strength of the information that you set him to spy upon me.

PROTHERO. Quite right. I did.

SYD. You did? You own it?

PROTHERO. Well, what's the use of denying it?

SYD. (*very indignantly*). May I ask you why you set that man to spy upon me?

PROTHERO. Because I thought it judicious, my dear Sydenham, to act upon the principle which you taught me in our transactions with our friend Reffell.

SYD. The principle I taught you?

PROTHERO. Yes, the principle of invariably

setting one honest man to look after another honest man. (*Murmurs of "Oh! Oh!"*)

LORD B. Mr. Prothero, it is useless to prevaricate any further——

PROTHERO. Prevaricate, Lord Bicester! I don't intend to prevaricate, I assure you! I intend to be quite plain with all of you.

SYD. I think it's time. Here we are with our money lost, our characters blown upon, our futures ruined——

PROTHERO. Quite true! Quite true!

SYD. The whole press of the country calling us common swindlers and rogues!

PROTHERO. Quite true! Quite true!

SYD. Well, sir, what have you to say?

PROTHERO. The first thing that strikes me, my dear Sydenham, is that we are all in the swim together.

SYD. Well?

PROTHERO. That being so, I fancy you had better all of you try to keep me afloat, instead of trying to drown me.

SYD. Drown you?

PROTHERO. Isn't that what you are all trying to do? But understand me quite plainly, we all sink or swim together. I don't know exactly how we stand with regard to the law. Thank God, it's rather vague in company cases, and with care we may manage to wriggle out without a stain on our characters or our

consciences. But it's doubtful. A good deal will depend upon our reputations.

LORD B. I must insist upon some one vindicating my reputation.

PROTHERO. Certainly, Lord Bicester! I'll vindicate it myself. And you shall vindicate mine. We will all vindicate each other, and if any of you think that you're going to sink me and swim yourselves, I will beg you to correct that idea at once. You have stuck to me in the past, I will not desert you in the future. My arm is round all your necks, and if I go down, you all go down with me, I assure you. Is there any gentleman requires any further explanation? No? Then we will enjoy ourselves.

REFF. But, Prothero—this is all very well, you know, but——

PROTHERO. Well?

REFF. We must offer some explanation to the public, and to our shareholders.

PROTHERO. We will, my dear Reffell, we will. You call a general meeting, and I will offer a full explanation of everything to everybody. You leave the explaining business to me. And now I hope we shall settle down to a pleasant social evening.

MRS. PROTHERO *comes in through the archway, half drawing aside curtain.*

MRS P. Mr. Lambert is in the next room. He wishes to speak to you privately.

PROTHERO. Ask Mr. Lambert to please wait. When I have finished with my friends I will attend to him.

MRS. P. It's urgent—very urgent.

GEORGE *enters at archway.*

PROTHERO. Well?

GEORGE. Mr. Prothero, I want a few words with you.

PROTHERO. As many as you please, sir.

GEORGE. Before these gentlemen?

PROTHERO. Why not?

GEORGE. You wish me to speak out?

PROTHERO. Yes! yes!

GEORGE. Take care! It's at your cost if I do.

PROTHERO. No, sir! It's at your cost if you do. Speak out!

MRS. P. No. You will see Mr. Lambert alone—if you please—(*to* HUBBOCK *and the others, getting them off*). (*To* PROTHERO.) Yes, dear——

PROTHERO. Gentlemen, I'll join you in a few minutes. Lord John, you'll find some excellent cigars in the smoking-room. Lord Bicester, you won't be going——?

LORD B. Well, if I could be quite sure that my character——

(*Exeunt all the men except* PROTHERO *and* GEORGE. MRS. PROTHERO *goes off last, looks at the two men, and draws the curtains on them.*)

PROTHERO. Now, sir.

GEORGE. Now, Mr. George Jackman——

PROTHERO. Jackman!

GEORGE. That is your name. I told you I should continue my inquiries till I did learn who and what you were. I found reason to connect you with a party of long-firm swindlers, but you were so slippery that I couldn't tell which of those gentlemen you were. To-night I took a friend of yours to my rooms, and with the help of a sovereign, two glasses of whisky, and a few leading questions, I managed to identify him as Robert Cushing, and you as George Jackman.

MRS. PROTHERO *enters, comes down to them anxiously.*

GEORGE. I also learned from Cushing—that—(*turns to her*) forgive me for saying it—that you have been this man's wife and accomplice for many years.

MRS. P. You know—that I—(*shows great shame*). Oh! (*Turns away. A pause.*)

PROTHERO. What else do you know?

GEORGE. I don't want to know any more. For her sake, if you care for her, don't force me to go any further. I'm not obliged to pursue my inquiries. I'm not obliged to learn whether you have any debt to pay to your country.

PROTHERO. Well, then, why the devil don't you leave us alone, and go your own way?

GEORGE. Because I must satisfy myself about my birth and my people. I believe you can tell me.

PROTHERO. I can!

GEORGE. Answer me a few questions truthfully, and I promise you I'll let the whole matter drop so far as you and she are concerned.

LADY CLARABUT *enters at archway.*

LADY C. Oh, I beg pardon. You are engaged.

GEORGE. No—no—at least—Is Sir William there?

LADY C. Yes.

GEORGE. I think you have both a right to be here. Will you ask him to come this way?

(LADY CLARABUT *beckons at archway.*)

GEORGE. For your wife's sake—I want to spare her——

PROTHERO. You don't want to spare me?

GEORGE. Why should I? You are nothing to me.

Enter SIR WILLIAM, *comes down stage with* LADY CLARABUT.

GEORGE. Sir William—Lady Clarabut, if you give me your daughter, I wish you to be sure that nothing will arise in the future to make you regret it. If there is anything to be known, I'd rather you knew it at once.

LADY C. You're a dear good fellow. I'm sure

you love Nina too much to wish us to sacrifice her.

GEORGE. Yes, yes—but——(*To* PROTHERO.) Now, will you answer my questions?

PROTHERO. Yes!

MRS. P. (*aside*). George! You won't—you won't——

PROTHERO (*aside*). Leave me alone. Leave me alone. (*To* GEORGE.) Go on, sir.

GEORGE. My father? Who was he?

PROTHERO. Your father? (*Mute appeal from* MRS. PROTHERO.) Your father? Well, he was a very old friend of mine——

GEORGE. In your line of——

PROTHERO. Of business? Well—he was a dear good fellow!

GEORGE. Where is he?

PROTHERO. Dead.

GEORGE. Dead?

PROTHERO. Yes, died on a voyage to Australia. Poor Jack Burton! I was very much attached to him. That's the reason I took so much interest in you. I went to Gravesend to see him off—I can see him on the landing-stage. When we shook hands for the last time he gave me this ring—(*pointing to ring on watch-chain*). I've worn it ever since.

GEORGE. My mother?

PROTHERO. Oh, she had been dead a good many years before that. I never knew her. A very good

woman, I believe—much too good for him. You needn't be ashamed of her memory. She had nothing to do with our—profession.

GEORGE. My father—was there anything against him?

PROTHERO. Well—there were a few things. But he was a dear good fellow—why rake them up? Why not let them rest with him at the bottom of the ocean? Poor Jack!—one of the best and honestest fellows that ever breathed.

GEORGE. Honest?

PROTHERO. According to his lights.

LADY C. But are you sure, Mr. Prothero, that this Burton left no trace, nothing that could be used against Mr. Lambert in his future career?

PROTHERO. Quite. The man's dead. There's an end of him.

GEORGE. Lady Clarabut—Sir William, are you satisfied?

SIR W. Quite, eh, Margaret?

LADY C. Quite. So very kind and considerate of such a father to die.

PROTHERO. It was very obliging of him, wasn't it?

GEORGE. Thank you, Mr.—Prothero. I'll keep my word to you. But if I may advise you, I have Mr. Cushing in my rooms, he is safely locked there for the present with a bottle of whisky. In kindness to you I'll keep him there for the night.

PROTHERO. Why?

GEORGE. From some hints that he dropped over his whisky I think you will be well advised to leave the country before he gets loose.

PROTHERO. Leave the country!

MRS. P. Yes, George; yes, it will be best. I'm sure; yes, dear.

GEORGE. You'll be able to catch the midnight mail to Liverpool; and the White Star boat sails to-morrow.

PROTHERO. Midnight mail? But my guests? If I go, what is to become of them? Will you be kind enough to entertain them?

LADY C. Well—— We won't mention your departure.

PROTHERO (*goes up to curtain, calls*). Palmer.

PALMER (*enters*). Yes, sir.

(PROTHERO *whispers instructions to* PALMER.)

PALMER. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

GEORGE. Mrs. Prothero, you intend to share your husband's fortunes?

MRS. P. Oh yes.

GEORGE. I can be of no further service to you?

MRS. P. No, thank you, none.

PROTHERO. Your cloak's in there, Liz.

MRS. P. Yes. (*He gives her a sign.*)

(*Exit* MRS. PROTHERO, R.)

PROTHERO. I rely on you to entertain my guests, Lady Clarabut, after my departure.

LADY C. Oh, certainly; and as I am very much

indebted to you, remember I shall be glad if I can be of any service to you—on the other side of the world.

PROTHERO. Thank you. (*To* GEORGE.) Your father wasn't a bad sort of a fellow—you'd like his ring?

GEORGE. Yes, I should.

(PROTHERO *gives ring.*)

PROTHERO. You'll shake hands with his old friend?

(GEORGE *draws back.* PROTHERO *shows pain.*)

Re-enter MRS. PROTHERO, *cloaked over her evening dress.*

MRS. P. I'm ready, George.

Re-enter PALMER *with* PROTHERO'S *hat and coat.*

PALMER (*helping on*). The hansom's waiting, sir.

PROTHERO. At the back door?

PALMER. Yes, sir. Everything is ready.

PROTHERO. Thank you, Palmer.

(*Exit* PALMER.)

Enter NINA *through curtains.*

NINA. Mamma—what is it? What's the matter?

LADY C. Matter? Nothing, my dear—except

that we've given our consent to your marriage with Mr. Lambert.

PROTHERO. Good-bye, Sir William. Good-bye, Lady Clarabut. (*Holds out hand to* GEORGE.) You'll shake hands with an old friend of your father's? What does it matter—you'll never see me again!

(GEORGE *shakes hands.* PROTHERO *shakes hands cordially.*)

PROTHERO. God bless you! (MRS. PROTHERO *breaks down.* PROTHERO *goes to her.*) Buck up, old girl! Buck up!

(*Exeunt* PROTHERO *and* MRS. PROTHERO. GEORGE *gives his arm to* NINA. *Curtains are drawn asunder, discover reception in full swing.* Guests *enter and talk. Buzz, buzz, buzz of conversation. Band strikes up a lively tune.*)

CURTAIN.

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